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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

The Revolution, the Transitional State and the Working Class Party: Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg

by

Leslie Barson

A THESIS

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OF Master of Arts

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Date 2 May 1988

Dedication

To Roger

Without your patience, kindness and guidance this would not have been written

and

To Grandma

who is always with me.

Abstract

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg are compared on the issue of the working class party as two paradigms on the revolutionary left. This is done without an understanding that each held different views of the transitional state.

A revolutionary's analysis of the economic system of capitalism will affect how he or she views the battle for its removal. How the battle is fought has direct consequences for the state structure replacing it. The view of this new state will also effect how a theorist sees the battle for its implementation and what is considered necessary for the transition to socialism. This thesis will trace the development of Lenin's and Luxemburg's ideas on the capitalist economy, revolution, and the transitional state itself.

Luxemburg contends class consciousness will be raised and a socialist revolution hastened, through knowledge of the internal contradictions in capitalism that point to its inevitable downfall. Constant revolutionary activity, mistakes and self-criticism are essential in the proletariat's efforts to establish its own organisation, namely, Soldiers' and Workers' Councils. These are led by the masses themselves and in their own interests. This is the transitional state for Luxemburg. Luxemburg holds that the masses themselves must take power and thus the new society will be immediately run by them.

Lenin, in 1917, thought a socialist revolution was possible in Russia, as Russian capitalism was well-entrenched and the government of the February revolution was weak and reactionary. Lenin was less clear about who would take power. He was wary of the Soviets taking power as the majority there supported the Duma government. Increasingly his writings become more ambiguous as to who should take power in the transitional state. The vital point is that unlike Luxemburg, he did not feel it was necessary for the class conscious mass to take power in order for the transitional state to be socialist. This distinction pervades their analyses on the working class party and without it, it is not possible to understand their debate on the party.

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Table of Contents

Chapter — Page

I. Introduction 1

II. Luxemburg 12

A. Politics and Economics in the Capitalist State . 12

B. Revolution and the Transitional State 26

Introduction 26

The Mass Strike 27

C. The Role of the Party 44

III. Lenin 60

A. Politics and Economics in the Capitalist State . 60

B. Revolution and the Transitional State 68

C. The Role of the Party 83

IV. Conclusion 89

V. References Cited 100

I. Introduction

Vladimir Ilyich (Ulyanov) Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg have often been compared by partisan critics attempting to enhance the reputation of one at the expense of the other. They are obvious candidates for comparison: both were leading figures during the same period of the Second International, (1891-1914), both led revolutions in their respective countries, both were on the 'left' of the Social Democratic movement and they debated certain vital issues with each other, most notably, the structure and role of the working class party in socialist revolutions.

It is this subject that attracted our attention first to the work of Luxemburg and then to her 'debate' with Lenin. The debate covers a fifteen year period (1904-1919) during which time the views of the protagonists, Lenin's in particular change considerably. In the early years of this century the two, it seemed held completely opposing views on the question of the party. After the 1905 revolution, however, Lenin moved closer to Luxemburg's position in a number of important respects. Yet there remained significant differences between these two leaders throughout the revolutionary conflagrations of 1917-1919. The nature of these differences and their deeper causes are our central concern here. We will argue that their differences over the issue of the structure and role of the party reflect a fundamental divergence, namely, a different analysis of the transitional state and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

For Lenin, the transitional state meant power in the hands of the agency of socialism, namely the party. The masses come to take power gradually as class consciousness developed once the socialist party was in power. The party would educate the masses and enact policies that would hasten the emergence of the new society. For Luxemburg, in the transitional state, the masses are in power. All the work of raising the masses to a position in which they could take power had to be done before the final revolution. Through trial and error, during revolutionary periods, the masses would develope the necessary abilities of self-criticism and self-organisation needed to take power. The differences between Lenin and Luxemburg on the issue of organisation and the working class party, are but a reflection of a more fundamental divergence over the nature of the transitional state and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Because this crucial question has been largely neglected in the scholarly literature, the scope of this investigation will be broad. It will include Lenin's and Luxemburg's views of capital, the nature of revolution and the post-revolutionary state, as well as an analysis of their position on the working class party.

Marxism focuses on a critique of capitalist society. It also, however, articulates a vision of the type of society which will replace capitalism. Marxism is not only a philosophy of destruction, it is also one of rejuvenation and rebuilding. Therefore in any truly Marxist analysis

there are these two major components. The first, is an analysis of the present society, its crises and what can be done to hasten this decline. Here the question of organisation looms large. As early as 1847 Marx put forward a concept of the working class according to which the working class becomes a class, that is realizes its potential, only through struggle and organisation. [1] The second component includes a vision of how a new society will be organised in order to achieve socialist goals and here too, the role of the revolutionary organisation comes into prominence.

It is only possible to dissect a theorist's work into these two components, the analytical and the prescriptive, in the abstract. In actual fact, both aspects are inseparable and intertwined. This was certainly the case with Lenin and Luxemburg. Their analysis of capitalism identified the systematic weaknesses of the capitalist structure, as well as those manifestations of the coming collapse which harboured revolutionary potential. It told them from where the impetus for revolution will come. In this exposition, however, they were guided by a vision of the future. Here both Lenin and Luxemburg used the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to describe the immediate transitional state after the successful seizure of power by the masses. Their vision of the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, the transitional society,

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[1] Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, International Publishers, New York, 1963, pp.173.

predetermined their response to revolutionary events. Thus to understand the differences between Lenin and Luxemburg on the party, it is necessary to trace the development of each not only on the issue of the party, but also on the underlying problems of the shape of the power structure after the revolution, and their vision of the socialist future.

In reviewing the literature on this topic it becomes apparent that the commentators fall into two main groups. In the first category are those who tend to use Luxemburg only to illuminate their own position. [2] The second group see Luxemburg as a foil to Lenin. Looking at some of the commentators in this second group, we can see that they tend to slip into a simplistic, superficial analysis whose main purpose is to put Lenin and Luxemburg into opposite camps regardless of the evidence to the contrary. [3] The two pieces Luxemburg wrote directly against Lenin, coupled with the finale of their revolutionary activity, her's in death and his in taking power, have inclined commentators who dislike Lenin to see Luxemburg as their ally, as a prophetic critic of Bolshevik totalitarianism. Those sympathetic to Lenin, on the other hand, either ignore Luxemburg or mention her only

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[2] See E. Vollrath, 'Rosa Luxemburg's Theory of Revolution', Social Research, Vol 40, No.1, Spring 1973, pp.83-109.
See also C.L. Carsten, 'Freedom and Revolution:Rosa Luxemburg', in L. Labedz,(eds.),Revisionism, London,1962, pp.55-66.

[3] See B. Wolfe, introduction to Leninism or Marxism, University of Michigan,1961.
See also M.A. Waters, introduction to Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, New York, 1970, pp.1-32.

in passing. They have no need to refer to a long extinguished flame.

Most students of Luxemburg, in our opinion, do her a disservice in their comparisons, by making her appear a systematic anti-Leninist. There are others in this group who try to probe in more depth and ask if there was a real difference between Lenin and Luxemburg and if so what exactly it was. Paul Frolich, for example, is an unquestioning supporter of Luxemburg. He feels like many, the differences between Lenin and Luxemburg reflect a difference in beliefs. For him, Luxemburg was too optimistic in her faith in the masses and she underestimated the power of organisation.[4] Frolich makes clear dividing lines between Lenin and Luxemburg. She was interested in the general aims of the movement, he in achieving one aim, power; she was interested in the masses, he in the party and leading the movement. [5] This statement of the differences between Lenin and Luxemburg is common to many who study Luxemburg. The theme that Luxemburg was naive about the revolutionary capacity of the masses and its corollary that she therefore underestimated the role of organisation is routinely developed. Lenin on the other hand, it is assumed, did not fall into either of these traps as is shown by the fact of his taking power.

Lelio Basso's analysis of Luxemburg is a variation on the main thrust of Frolich's arguments. Basso maintains that

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[4]Frolich,p.108.
[5]Frolich,p.108.

the key to understanding the debate between Lenin and Luxemburg lies in 'What is to Be Done?'. Lenin says the masses receive class consciousness from outside, from the party, whereas for Luxemburg consciousness comes from the struggle.[6] Luxemburg, he maintains, is guilty of "excessive belief in the spontaneity of the masses". [7]

Georg Lukacs, in his critical essay on Luxemburg, constantly upbraids her for her "overestimation of the organic character of the course of history", a euphemism for Luxemburg's alleged overestimation of the masses. Counterposing Luxemburg's views to those of the Bolsheviks, he writes that for Luxemburg "the real revolutionary spirit is to be sought and found exclusively in the elemental spontaneity of the masses", whereas the "central party organisation" opposes the masses. [8] In our view this is an exaggerated and distorted, albeit typical, view of Luxemburg.

For Norman Geras the essential difference between Lenin and Luxemburg lies in the fact that whereas Luxemburg deals in generalities, Lenin is concrete. [9] The problem it seems, is that Luxmeburg lacked a solid understanding of the real situation, hence she overestimated the role of the masses and underestimated the importance of organisation. Had Luxemburg been more concrete in her analysis, she would have approximated Lenin's views, since, as Geras argues, their

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[6]Basso,p.98.
[7]Basso,p.105.
[8]Lukacs,p.277,284. See also p.274,279.
[9]Geras,p,202.

essential project and trajectory were the same. Underlying this exposition is the idea that there is only one road towards the seizure of power and the Lenin and Luxemburg were on the same road. He got the answers right, she did not; he worked out the scenario in detail, she never got beyond an outline.

This however, is not an adequate picture of the differences between the two theorists. We will argue that Lenin and Luxemburg were on two different paths within the same Marxist tradition of the Second International. They had different paths in mind, different visions of the future. Moreover, it is our contention that each was just as concrete or as general as the other. Since they were not heading toward the same goal, they faced the problems they encountered from a different standpoint. It is a misrepresentation to say that Luxemburg was mostly concerned with the ends of revolution while Lenin concentrated on the means. Both were equally concerned with the means and ends but they did not share the same view of the ends and therefore their means differed.

J. P. Nettl in his biography of Luxemburg, gives a slightly different interpretation to the Lenin and Luxemburg debate. He says the main spring of the disagreement lies in the interpretation of how class consciousness is formed; "with Rosa Luxemburg seeing this as a growing, dynamic process which could only be diverted" and Lenin believing

"in the critical minimum-effort thesis."[10] This difference, he goes on, "arose out of the totally different circumstances absorbing their attention." [11] It is true that these two confronted very different conditions which impacted on their work. But this obvious point was recognised by both Lenin and Luxemburg and to suggest that they were unaware of it does not do justice to the intelligence of either theorist. (We will return to this criticism.)

Evidence of sharp disagreement between Lenin and Luxemburg usually focuses on two main articles written by the latter. The first written in 1904, called 'Organisational Questions of Social Democracy', was a reply to an article by Lenin titled 'One Step Foward, Two Steps Back', published in the same year. Luxemburg in this article, takes up among other things, the issue of the degree of centralism in the socialist party, [12] the degree of freedom allowed to party members, [13] and the role of errors by the working class. [14]

The second article was written in 1917 and is entitled 'The Russian Revolution'. In it Luxemburg, while praising the courage and far-sighted vision of the Bolsheviks, also criticises them on several grounds. She accuses the Bolsheviks of destroying democracy and freedom and more

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[10] Nettl, p.227.
[11] Nettl, p.227.
[12] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.117, 118.
[13] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.119.
[14] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.130

importantly, she feels they have lost touch with those whom they are supposed to represent. The dictatorship in Russia, she argued was in danger of becoming a dictatorship of the party rather than of the proletariat. In our opinion, most commentators lean rather too heavily on these two articles in their analyses of the differences between Lenin and Luxemburg on the party. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify in what manner we intend to use these articles. We will not use them as evidence of Luxemburg's attacks on Lenin. Rather, they do have value as indictors of Luxemburg's thought. These articles will be explored for what they reveal of her more fundamental assumptions, rather than focussing on their polemical nature. The reason the first article 'Organisational Questions of Social Democracy' is not a reliable indicator of any debate between Lenin and Luxemburg is twofold. Firstly, Lenin himself said, in 'One Step Foward, Two Steps Back', he was writing about a specific, concrete situation the lessons from which could not be generalised:

> she puts in my mouth commonplaces, general principles and conceptions, absolute truths, and tries to pass over the relative truths, pertaining to perfectly definite facts, with which alone I operate. [15]

Since the article against which Luxemburg was arguing did not really reflect Lenin's general views but his analysis of

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[15] CW7,477.

a specific situation, her article cannot be used to defeat him. Secondly, the article reflected problems she faced elsewhere at the time. She had others in mind at times when writing this article and therefore it is not wholly accurate in its criticism of Lenin.

The second piece, 'The Russian Revolution', is also problematic when used as evidence of a debate between Lenin and Luxemburg. It was written while she was in prison and therefore she had very little knowledge of what was actually happening in Russia. It was also repudiated by her on her release from prison when she was told of the circumstances surrounding the Bolshevik take-over. It seems very attractive to place much weight on this article as it foretells the fate of the Bolshevik Revolution. This may be so, but this is a different matter. It cannot be concluded that because dangers in Bolshevik action, which she predicted, came to pass that Lenin wanted that outcome or did not himself foresee the problems.

Although it is not possible to take these two articles as true indicators of any debate between Lenin and Luxemburg, they are nontheless expressions of Luxemburg's ideas on the questions of party and revolution. These articles are important as evidence of Luxemburg's position, on such topics as the working class party, revolution and the transitional state. We will use them as such to support our interpretation of Luxemburg's ideas.

Our discussion of Luxemburg will begin with an examination of her analysis of the capitalist state. Next we will discuss her concept of revolution, followed by her views on transitional state, and lastly her ideas on the party. We will examine the same questions in Lenin's thought, contrasting Luxemburg's and Lenin's ideas as we go along. It must be remembered that this is a somewhat artificial breakdown of the different aspects involved in these questions, but it is done for analytical purposes. Finally, we will summarize the intricate connection between these facets.

II. Luxemburg

A. Politics and Economics in the Capitalist State

One of the central dilemmas for Marxism is the relationship between politics and economics. Does the economic foundation of capitalism determine the type of political and social institutions which exist or vice versa? Or is it that the two interact in an indeterminate way? How one answers this question determines how one analyses capitalist society and how one interprets its revolutionary potential.

During the period of the Second International, Marxists dealing with this dichotomy saw economics as the 'scientific' basis of Marxism. For them it was scientific in the sense expressed by Positivism, namely, that economics was based on objective reality, on discernable laws. This, of course was a narrowing of the concept of economics from the one that Marx had used. His idea of economics encompassed both the forms of production and relations of production and social relations, that is the entire realm of the social structure. During the Second International, Marxists tried to reduce econonics to scientific law-like relations so popular in the positivistic age. All subjective, unquantifiable elements, were removed. This had the effect of bringing the Marxist notion of economics very close to that held by the capitalists themsleves, that is, economics as a highly technical subject. This also had

serious consequences for the socialist movement; namely, it tended to remove the focus on class contradictions and thus contributed to the rapid rise of reformist, conciliationist and opportunist politics.

Even revolutionary Marxists were not exempt from being influenced by the new positivist philosophy that was infecting the physical sciences in the early nineteenth century. One of the consequenses of this need for a scientific Marxism was that the economic analysis became identified with material reality, and was seen as somehow being primary, autonomous from the so-called subjective element and therefore from politics. Politics and social formations became identified with subjective reality, bound up with problems of human needs and interests. The task was to produce a theoretically and scientifically correct economic analysis, which in some indeterminate way would underpin and guide political activity. Having so rendered this split it seemed possible to study and know the objective reality more easily than the subjective world and to rely on its constancy. By knowing the course of capitalism the revolutionary could educate the subjective element and thus facilitate the revolutionary change of society. An appropriate analysis of economic conditions allowed conclusions about the political and social formations of capital to be drawn. Guided by this knowledge, the revolutionaries could act accordingly to bring down the system. Luxemburg shows elements of this postivist outlook

and it is against this backround that Luxemburg's econonic analysis must be seen.

Luxemburg thought she had detected a mistake in Volume II of Marx's Capital . It was not so much a mistake as an omission due to the unfinished and sketchy nature of the volume and the way capital was viewed as an abstract formal system. The mistake revolved around the question of how a fully capitalist world can accumulate capital. "At the heart of the problem ... was the realization of surplus value." [16] This involved expanded reproduction. Luxemburg thought that because of the abstract nature of Marx's analysis, he had developed a theory in which it was impossible for capitalism to realize its surplus value. If the reality of capitalism were taken into account said Luxemburg, then the realization of surplus value and therefore accumulation was possible only through a third market, a market outside capitalism. Let us examine this in a little more detail.

In volumn II of Capital Marx assumed a closed capitalist system, with only two classes, workers and capitalists. The total social production of society was divided into three parts. First was constant capital, which stands for raw materials and the amount of fixed capital used in any period. This part of the production cycle maintains its value. Fixed capital refers to expenditure on things such as machinery and buildings. The second part of social production refers to variable capital which stands

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[16] Sweezy, p.202.

for wages. Variable capital changes during the production cycle. Surplus value is the third component and it is the extra component that labour produces above and beyond what the capitalist puts in under the headings constant capital and variable capital. Every commodity, Marx says, can be described as constant capital plus variable capital plus surplus value. The capitalist needs to sell its commodities in order to realise the surplus value stored in them, that is, turn the surplus value into money. This is used by the capitalist in part to upgrade his living standard, but also and more importantly, to accumulate in money form.

If, we see the capitalist world as a closed system composed only of labouring and capitalist classes, then Luxemburg argues, it is difficult to see which of these two classes will purchase enough commodities to enable the capitalist to realise the surplus value in them. "Workers have no means beyond the wages covering bare necessities which they receive from their employers." [17] Nor could the capitalist class realise the surplus value for if they did so it would mean there would be no accumulation and then capitalism would "relapse into a sort of modernised slave economy or feudalism". [18]

The answer for Luxemburg lay in buyers who are independent of the capitalist system. "They have to be consumers who receive their means of purchase on the basis of commodity exchange, i.e. also production of goods, but

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[17] Anti-Critique, p.55.
[18] Anti-Critique, p.55.

taking place outside of capitalist commodity production". [19] Reality also confirms this model for Luxemburg. The world is not made up of only two classes. There are many areas of non-capitalist economies that co-exist with the capitalist world;

> So there must develop right from the start an exchange relationship between capitalist production and non-capitalist milieu, where capital not only finds the possibility of realizing surplus value in hard cash for further capitalization, but also receives various commodities to extend production, and finally wins new proletarianized labour forces by disintegrating the non-capitalist forms of production. [20]

It is not necessary for the third market to be a foreign market. It is only necessary that it be outside the working class/capitalist relations. It could be found in a peasant element left over from feudal relations and now inside a capitalist state. It does become increasingly likely however, that the third market will be a foreign market as the third markets in capitalist countries become capitalist by virtue of being 'used up' in the capitalist realization cycle.

Imperialism then becomes a necessary part of the capitalist realisation of surplus value. Imperialism is not only a simple carving up of non-capitalist countries but a

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[19] Anti-Critique, p.57.
[20] Anti-Critique, p.59.

continual vying for more and more control in non-capitalist countries because, as the capitalist sector begins to realize its surplus value through the third markets, that third market itself becomes drawn into the capitalist cycle. For Luxemburg it then becomes 'used up' and can no longer realize surplus value and the collapse of capitalism will follow.

> Thus capitalism expands because of its mutual relationship with non-capitalist social strata and countries, accumulating at their expense and at the same time pushing them aside to take their place. The more the capitalist countries participate in this hunting for accumulation areas, the rarer the non-capitalist places still open to the expansion of capital become and the tougher the competition; its raids turn into a chain of economic and political catastrophes: world crises, wars, revolution. [21]

Imperialism in Luxemburg's work ties together her economic theory and her analysis of the world political situation: "at first glance it [this solution and conception of the problem of accumulation] appears to be a purely theoretical exercise. And yet the practical meaning of the problem is at hand - the connection with the most outstanding fact of our time - imperialism." [22]

She defines imperialism as the "political expression of the process of accumulation of capital in its competitive

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[21] Anti-Critique, p.60.
[22] Anti-Critique, p.60.

struggle for the residue of the non-capitalist systems which have not yet been taken over." [23] In Anti-Critique she defines imperialism as the "expansion of the rule of capital from old capitalist countries to new areas, and the economic and political competition of those countries for the new parts of the world." [24] Imperialism is both the solution of capitalism's problem of accumulation, and at the same time, because, it results in worsening conditions for the proletariat, it is also the well-spring of revolution.

How imperialism can both prolong the existence of capitalism and lead to its downfall is a point in Luxemburg's thought which needs further inquiry. The existence of capitalism as an economic system is dependent on accumulation. If accumulation is not possible, capitalism will collapse and it is imperialism which allows further accumulation. In order to see how imperialism leads to the downfall of capitalism, it is necessary to quote at length from Luxemburg:

> [B]y this process capital prepares its own destruction in two ways. As it approaches the point where humanity only consists of capitalists and proletarians, further accumulation will become impossible. At the same time, the absolute and undivided rule of capital aggravates class struggle throughout the world and the international economy and political anarchy to such an extent that, long

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[23] Luxemburg cited in Basso, p.42-3.
[24] Anti-Critique, p.61.

> before the last consequences of economic development, it must lead to the rebellion of the international proletariat against the existence of the rule of capital. [25]

It must be remembered that this happens over a long period of time. The first effects of imperialism are to prolong capitalism's life by allowing accumulation to take place. This lowers tensions inside the capitalist countries. This tension would develop due to the inability of capital to accumulate and, consequently is lessened by its ability to do so. It does not seem that Luxemburg held any theory of a labour aristocracy developing in the older capitalist countries. She speaks as if the capitalist class would always keep the workers at a subsistence level: "According to the standpoint of the capitalist as a class ... workers are not, like others, customers for their commodities, but simply the labour force, whose maintenance out of part of its own produce is an unfortunate necessity, reduced to the minimum society allows." [26]

Luxemburg contends that even before the the third markets become totally 'used up', the systematic exploitation involved in capitalism, will lead to upheaval. The greater the advancement of imperialist trends

> ... the more the daily story of capital accumulation on a world scale will become a never-ending chain of catastrophe and political and social convulsions

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[25] Anti-Critique, p.60.
[26] Anti-Critique, p.55

> which, together with the periodical economic catastrophies arising from the crises, will make any continuation of capital accumulation an impossibility and the revolt of the international working classes against the domination of capital a necessity. [27]

Unfortunately, it is undeniable that Luxemburg made a mistake in her economic analysis. It is possible to accumulate inside a closed capitalist system. As N. Bukharin pointed out it is unclear from Luxemburg's work whether she wants to say accumulation is impossible in a closed capitalist system or the smaller claim that it is only part of surplus value that is realizable. [28] The former interpretation makes her theory untenable while the latter can be accepted in some degree. It is the case that periodic crises in capital emerge because production outstrips consumption. This can be described as an inability of capital to realize part of its surplus value. This is supported by Sweezy when he says there is a problem of accumulation in capitalism due to adding "more to the means of production than the rate of increase of consumption can justify or sustain".[29] To support this he adds the following footnote:

> "The essential point was succinctly expressed by a Harvard University economist, Prof. Arthur Smithies,

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[27] Luxemburg cited in Basso, p.46.
[28] Bukharin, p.178-179.
[29] Sweezy, p.484.

> in the middle of the slump that began in 1957. 'The basic factor in the current recession' he is quoted as saying 'is that the economy generates capacity faster than demand. Unless we have some peaceful external stimulus as we had at the end of the war and during the Korean war, we tend to generate over capacity. It is a persistent trend of our economy' (Business Week, April 5,1958,p.28) [30]

This supports Luxemburg's intuition that to some extent, in order to alleviate capital's crisis of accumulation, some 'external stimulus' must be found. Here we have a place for the 'third market' inside Marx's economic framework. In this analysis Luxemburg was not wrong in the formulation of the problem, but in the weight she gave to it.

In her theory of the accumulation of capital Luxemburg wanted to expose how imperialism was a necessary part of capitalism and that capitalism could not continue indefinitely but would eventually collapse due to its own internal economic contradictions. Her economic theory connects imperialism, militarism, and colonialism (and decries as opportunist any policy of disarmament within capitalist relations). But the problem for Luxemburg is how a revolutionary stance fits in. Bukharin criticises Luxemburg's economic work saying it looks attractive but actually lacks revolutionary content. [31] Since in her

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[30] Sweezy,p.484, my emphasis.
[31] Bukharin,p.263.

analysis capitalism will break down by itself, why is a revolution necessary? This was a dilemma for Luxemburg.

Although her economic analysis implies this is so, her whole life was spent in practical activity with the goal of bringing about a revolution. Never does she say that socialism is only possible when the third markets are gone. In fact she says that it is through the worsening situation of the working class that the revolution will come. According to Luxemburg, it is through a better understanding of economics, as one of many facets of class consciousness, that the working class will come to understand its position under capitalism and the necessity of revolution. The theoretical possibility of the end of capitalism will give confidence for the masses to act. To understand economics, Luxemburg explains, is to know one's position in society and is therefore a spur to revolution. She says what follows from Marx's theory "is only the metamorphosis of theory into action, i.e. the struggle of the international proletariat for the institution of the socialist economic order". [32] Thus, when Luxemburg's life is seen as a whole and her practical work is joined with her economic analysis, her revolutionary position becomes clearer.

The second major criticism leveled by Bukharin at Luxemburg, is that by employing accumulation through the third market she has lessened the importance of profit, competition and exploitation of the working class. [33] By

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[32] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.248.
[33] Bukharin, p.246.

making non-capitalist sections of the world necessary for capital's survival, she had shifted the basis of capitalism onto the third market and also made the revolution dependent on it. Her economic theory does imply this, even though Luxemburg never realized it nor would she have accepted it. Given that she spent her political life fighting against reformist economic models and asserting the centrality of exploitation and profit in creating class consciousness and revolution, a contradiction in her work is exposed.

There is an ambiguity in her economic analysis. She seems to be walking two different mutually exclusive paths toward revolution. One is the economic path - that capital will break down by itself and the other is that of a revolutionary socialist striving to bring about a revolutionary transformation of society. It can be argued that the first of these interpretations does not make the second redundant. That is, without a revolution a socialist society need not succeed capitalism after its collapse. But what has disappeared in this interpretation of Luxemburg is the scientific weight of necessity for revolution so desired by Luxemburg. In this interpretation there is no logical necessity why either the working class needs a revolution in order to take power or why socialist theory would explain the best way for that to be achieved. Other forms of economic, political and social relations could develop after the demise of capitalism. It is Luxemburg's insistence on the logical necessity for Marxism that held her in this

dilemma. If capitalism can "maintain itself by suppressing its own contradiction" then socialism ceases to be a historic necessity. It then becomes anything you want to call it, but is no longer the result of the material development of society." If this is the case, she goes on then "the socialist transformation of society is only a utopia."[34]

Luxemburg hoped her political practice was being underpinned by a strength of analysis that was incontrovertible. This is not the case. Given that her economic views are not substantiated by her scientific analysis of capitalist economics, what does this mean for the rest of her theoretical work? She said that knowledge of the economic collapse of capital was to underpin working class confidence. Her political views, however, will not collapse if her economics views fall short of their objective. This is because it is politics that guided Luxemburg. Political analysis showed Luxemburg the way foward to revolution. She, in effect, refused to follow the implications of her economic work in any detailed manner since this would have meant political paralysis. She continually struggled with the problem of trying to base Marxism in the objective world yet had to fall back on the responsibility for change in the subjective realm where her knowledge and experience were strongest. Much of the reason for this problem in Luxemburg must be seen to be the

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[34] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p41. See also p.121 and p.324-5. and Anti-Critique, p.60.

simplistic split in scientific understanding that Positivism made between the subjective and the objective. For Positivists the subjective included all that was irrational and not quatifiable and the objective included all that was rational and quantifiable. The two categories by definition did not overlap. It is very difficult to see how these two ideas, formulated as they were, could ever be reconciled. Luxemburg's economic analysis is a symptom of this wider problem. She got over the problem on a daily basis by ignoring the implications of her economic work.

This interpretation of Luxemburg's economics is very important in understanding her further work because this tension underlies most of her writings. Her economic interpretation led her to view the world as doomed to stagnation, crisis and reactionary politics, unless Social Democracy acted urgently. Her economic analysis led her to a certain view of vast irreconcilable contradictions in capitalism. But although Luxemburg thought capitalism was doomed it was not clear that socialism would replace it. This had to be fought for. [35] Luxemburg never contended that one should wait for the collapse of capitalism and that socialism would automatically replace it. Hers was a fight for the best replacement to be in power as soon as possible. Economic analysis portraying the end of capitalism was most useful tactically, in dispelling the myth put foward by capitalism that the system was unshakeable.

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[35] See Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.59.

B. Revolution and the Transitional State

Introduction

Luxemburg envisaged revolution as a long term project culminating in an armed uprising by the masses. An armed uprising must not be confused with revolution itself. The transition from capitalism to socialism, she wrote,

> is only a result of a phase of development, of greater or lesser duration. It does not preclude the necessity for a final conversion of society by means of a violent political overthrow, that is, by revolution. However, revolution is impossible if bourgeois society has not previously passed through most phases of development in both the objective sphere- capitalism and the subjective - the working class. [36]

During the German revolution in her speech at the founding of the German Communist Party, Luxemburg ends after listing what the revolution still has to do, by reminding the audience that "revolutions are not easy" and the process is "a rather more tedious one than we had imagined in our first enthusiasm".[37] The socialist revolution "can reach full clarity and maturity only by stages, step by step, on the Golgotha path of its own bitter experience in struggle, through defeats and victories".[38]

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[36] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.179.
[37] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.427.
[38] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.376.

In a sense Luxemburg speaks of two types of revolution. The first type she saw as a long term project consisting of many struggles, some gains and many losses through which many lessons would be learnt. The second is the coup de grace, the final uprising that culminates with socialists taking power. In order to understand Luxemburg's concept of revolution in its wider meaning (the first type), it is important to look at her vision of the mass strike.

The Mass Strike

The mass strike for Luxemburg is a major indicator of and contributor to the process of revolution as the working class progresses towards the taking of power. The revolutionary process cannot be started deliberately but only begins when the subjective and objective conditions exist for it. She defines revolution in 'The Mass Strike, the Political Parties and the Trade Unions' as a "thoroughgoing reversal of class relations." [39] Revolution is a living social process [40] and the mass strike plays a vital role in that struggle by drawing together all the actors in the revolution and revealing to them the parts they are to play. [41]

Luxemburg recognised in the Russian Revolution of 1905 a new use for the mass strike. She saw it as the way the proletariat can create a situation facilitating daily

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[39] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.186.
[40] See Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.173-4.
[41] See Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.173.

political struggle and the means by which it can achieve political rights and conditions necessary to carry on the struggle. [42]

Luxemburg argued that the mass strike is not a tactic to be universally applied, since it does not always signify a revolutionary phase. By studying the broad context in which the strike is made one can determine if it signifies a revolutionary phase. The mass strike is a changeable phenomenon in that "it reflects all phases of the political and economic struggle, all stages and factors of the revolution."[43] It cannot be substituted for the revolution, nor is it the only form of the revolution nor the last stage of the revolution. It is one tool that can be used. Both the revolution and the mass strike are the the external forms of the class struggle and therefore have meaning only if they are studied in their historical situation. [44]

She describes four general aspects of the strike. Firstly, it is not one act but a "the rallying idea, of a whole period of the class struggle lasting for years, perhaps decades."[45] Luxemburg continually asserts the uneven, back and forth nature of the process toward socialism. She says the mass strike " does not proceed in a beautiful straight line but in a lightening-like zigzag." [46]

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[42] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.158.
[43] Rosa Luxemburg Speaksp.181.
[44] See Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.160-1.
[45] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.182.
[46] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.206. See also p.181-2.

Secondly, it is impossible to separate the political and economic factors of a mass strike. Chapter 4 of the mass strike pamphlet is called "The Interaction of the Political and Economic Struggle". This is the essence of the mass strike for Luxemburg. There may be many different reasons why the strikes begin, for better working conditions or higher wages. What is important is that strikes that begin without plan or design become political as well as economic.[47] In this way new prospects are opened up in the revolutionary process. As the proletariat engages in what seemed at first to be a strike on contained issues, it begins to spill over into revolutionary issues because of the realization by the workers that their original demands are shared by other workers and are not solvable under capitalism.

The economic struggle carries on all the time. A revolutionary period does not. But in a revolutionary period the economic struggle will focus the revolutionary energy by making the strike political. Demands change from higher wages and better working conditions to how to make sure these are kept after the strike, and this is a political question. Political victories, on the other hand, give renewed impetus for new and further economic demands. The two struggles are reciprocal. They are the "interlacing sides of the proletarian class struggle" and their "unity is the mass strike."[48]

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[47] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.183
[48] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.185.

The mass strike is composed then of the dual struggles, political and economic, and their movement is the inner mechanism of the mass strike.[49] It is in this way, in a revolutionary period, that small partial struggles grow into a general explosion. [50] "The law of motion of these phenomena [economic and political strikes] is clear: it does not lie in the mass strike itself nor in its technical details, but in the political and social proportions of the forces of the revolution". It is the objective external forces in society that move it. The mass strike is "merely the form of the revolutionary struggle."[51] It is the outward sign that a larger process is in motion.

Through the merging of political and economic demands, barriers are broken down and bourgeois ideologies are exposed. It is only through and during this process of revolutionary action, the mass strike, that the masses can be won to socialism. The masses must emancipate themselves through their own efforts and experiences, "It is only in the course of the revolutionary struggle that ideology, organisation and awareness can be transformed and adopt themselves to the more advanced tasks required by revolution." [52] This firstly explains again why action of the masses can never be premature and secondly, why democratic revolutions can become socialist. Even failed action can teach valuable lessons for next time.

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[49] See Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p188.
[50] See Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.188.
[51] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.182.
[52] Basso, p.94.

The third general aspect of the mass strike is that it is inseperable from the revolution. This is so because revolution is the drawing in of the mass of the people and is the outward sign of that the reciprocal political and economic struggles are at work. It is only when society is being rocked to its core that those who would otherwise have remained outside will join strikes. The political pressure will push someone into an economic statement of that pressure, the withdrawal of his labour.[53]

The fourth general aspect of the mass strike is that it cannot be decreed or created by will. It is an expression of the whole period of struggle, leading up to and reflecting the revolutionary nature of the time. It cannot be deliberately created as "the mass strike is not an isolated phenomenon but the expression of a certain phase of the class struggle."[54] It is created from the historical conditions as revolution is.[55]

The mass strike reacts to the objective social factors and subjective conditions. Objective factors include the rise of social and political tensions. The subjective factors arise from the extensive participation by the masses "which cannot be produced by organisation and discipline alone but is essentially linked with the existing tension and can thus be achieved by the unorganised masses."[56] The mass strike can also move ahead because it changes the

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[53]See Rosa Luxemburg Speaks,p.186-7.
[54]Luxemburg cited in Frolich,p.160.
[55]See Rosa Luxemburg Speaks,p.160-1.
[56]Basso,p.89.

conditions in society by its existence by "clarifying conditions, exposing the reality of society [repression] and conjuring up new forces [the unorganised], a new will."[57]

In describing the mass strike in 'What Next',an article written in 1910 and in 1913 in the 'Political Mass Strike', Luxemburg reiterates her 1906 position. The mass strike cannot be made by the party; "the notion of a mass strike shot from the pistol, 'made' one beautiful morning by a simple party directive, is only a childish fantasy". Again she says later it is "the external form of an action, not a mechanical artifical method." [58]

In the 'Political Mass Strike' she writes that the mass strike comes to the fore due to objective factors such as "the economic situation" and not because it has been "raised by a few supporters."[59] Later she states

> the mass strike is not something that one can make... Mass strikes can only take place when the historical preconditions for them are at hand. They cannot be made on command... When the class conflicts have become so pronounced and the political situation so tense that parliamentary means are no longer sufficient to advance the cause of the proletariat, then the mass strike is urgently necessary.[60]

The unorganised will join the struggle as the organised

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[57]Basso,p.93.
[58]Rosa Luxemburg:Selected Political Writings,p.153.
[59]Rosa Luxemburg:Selected Political Writings,p.179.
[60]Rosa Luxemburg:Selected Political Writings,p.181.

"will sweep the unorganised masses along with them. ... What would be the state of the proletarian struggle if we counted only on the organised?"[61]

The mass strike links the political and the economic demands of the masses. It links the political demands to industrial struggles and therefore everyday issues to a struggle with capitalism. This in turn implants class consciousness as well as teaches the first forms of democracy within the proletariat.

A very important issue is whether the mass strike is identical with the revolution for Luxemburg. The dominant conception of the mass strike at the time Luxemburg was writing, was the one developed by the anarchists. For them the mass strike was revolution. In order to overthrow the government of the day, what was needed was a mass strike. Luxemburg was very much against this idea and saw it as utopian, ahistorical and totally impractical for dealing with the enemy. Anarchism "exhausts itself in the following simple dilemma: either the proletariat as a whole are not yet in possession of the powerful organisation and financial resources required, in which case they cannot carry though the general strike; or they are already sufficiently well organised, in which case they do not need the general strike." [62] For Luxemburg, revolution was more than the mass strike. The mass strike is one tool, albeit a powerful one, in the arsenal of the proletariat. Unfortunately,

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[61] Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings, p. 183.
[62] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p. 156.

commentators seem to be confused on this point. Waters criticises Luxemburg for going " too far in the direction of equating the mass strike with revolution itself." [63] Harding also falls into this trap. When writing on Lenin's position vis a vis the mass strike he says, "mass politcal and economic strikes were not, however, in Lenin's view, to be identified with the revolution itself and here again his reflections differed from those of Rosa Luxemburg." [64] Luxemburg repeatedly emphasised that the mass strike was not identical with the revolution but was "both a symptom and a typical product of a revolutionary period."[65]

Revolution plays to its own rules. Firstly, the opponents play a large role, often taking the initiative away from the revolution. [66] Secondly, revolution can speed up the maturing process of the proletariat. Ironically, revolutionary advance can come about through defeats. Defeats are a vital contribution to socialist maturity and it is the defeats of the past on which the revolution stands today, "not one of which we could do without, and each of which is a part of our strength and clarity of purpose." [67] Defeats of the proletariat are the "seeds of the future triumph by the masses."[68]

Thirdly, revolutionary confrontation quickens the pace

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[63] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.153.
[64] Harding, p.303.
[65] Nettl, (1), p.499.
[66] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.412.
[67] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.413-4.
[68] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.415.

of events.[69] It polarises society, forcing people to take a stand and show their allegiances. This removes a lot of the 'illusion' that can stifle socialist action in calmer times. It forces into the open again and again the basic question,"the general reckoning between labour and capital. This reckoning is a world historical conflict between two mortal enemies which can be fought out only in a long power struggle, eye to eye, hand to hand."[70] In 'In Memory of the Proletarian Party' Luxemburg writes:

> the socialist revolution can only be completed by the working class, only mass struggle, the organisation of the proletariat and its enlightenment can bring about the conditions necessary for the future society. This idea of agitation and of organisation of the masses is the leitmotif of the entire program and makes clear that the party was preparing itself for a long period of work on the basis of the daily interest of the proletariat.[71]

The socialist struggle is a continuous daily struggle first for parliamentary democracy and democratization of the capitalist state and then for power itself. Although the fight for universal sufferage and equality of represention are not the real ends of the struggle, the fight for parliamentary democracy is very useful for two reasons.

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[69] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks,p.427
[70] Rosa Luxemburg:Selected Political Writings,p.298.
[71] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg,p.196.

Firstly, any democractization in capitalism gives the masses more freedom of movement in that society and secondly, the struggle itself helps mature the masses through experience in political life. Parliamentary democracy is both "necessary and indispensable to the working class because it renders the conquest of power both necessary and possible".[72] It does this by creating "political forms (autonomous administrations, electoral rights, etc.) which serve the proletariat as fulcrums in its task of transforming bourgeois society."[73] Only through the exercise of these democratic rights and in the struggle for democracy will the proletariat become "aware of its class interests and its historic tasks."[74]

The revolution's mass participatory nature was paramount throughout Luxemburg's work and her writings at the time of the German revolution are no exception. "The struggle for socialism has to be fought out by the masses alone, breast to breast against capitalism."[75] A theme met many times before in Luxemburg is that the masses will develope consciousness in and through struggle. "The masses must learn to use power, by using power."[76] It is through struggle that democracy is brought to the revolution. The masses must not only learn for themselves but also act for themselves, to guarantee a socialist future.

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[72] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.81.
[73] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.80.
[74] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.81.
[75] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.419. See also Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings, p.253 and 265.
[76] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.426.

Luxemburg's conception of revolution is closely linked to her view that a socialist majority is needed for a socialist revolution. Socialist education and maturity, freedom of expression and majority rule are all components of socialist democracy for Luxemburg. Her ideas on the majority help to make comprehensible her ideas on democracy and also uncover what she means by 'the masses'. By majority she does not mean the voters of the narrowly defined proletariat but the broad mass of the people encompassing all those who are oppressed under capitalism. The majority is not won to socialism before the revolution. It is gained during the revolution. The proletarian revolution is "the action of the great massive million of people." [77]

Writing on January 7, 1919 about a mass demonstration in the Siegesallee, she says that there one could see the "adamant revolutionary conviction, this magnificent mood, this energy that the masses exuded" and those who saw it must "conclude that politically the proletarians have grown enormously from their experience of their power and all that remains is for them to avail themselves of this power." [78]

A problem with Luxemburg's conception of revolution and mass strike seems to be the lack of clarity in her writings as to what constitutes a revolutionary period. It is a strategic concept for Luxemburg both in her understanding of the mass strike and in her analysis of the role of the party. She discusses the fact that revolutionary periods

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[77] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.370.
[78] Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings, p.291-2.

stop and start but she does not address the problem of how they are to be recognised. The process that creates them seem to be somehow out of our hands, part of the 'objective' movement of society. It seems as though through the reciprocal interaction of the objective and subjective, the revolutionary period is then made manifest in the action of the classes.

On the issue of the transitional state Luxemburg wrote as early as 1903 that in "the transition to socialism some dictatorship will be necessary although this does not preclude a violent revolution."[79] The liberation of the working class must be achieved through its own actions and therefore the dictatorship of the proletariat will be the dictatorship of the "entire revolutionary class."[80]

In the 'Russian Revolution' Luxemburg discusses the dictatorship of the proletariat in more depth. Similarly to Lenin, Luxemburg maintains that the dictatorship of the proletariat begins when state power is seized by the socialists. Just as Lenin does, so too Luxemburg discusses the nature of the dictatorship and its relation to democracy. This is a very important passage so we will quote it at length:

> The dictatorship consists in the manner of applying democracy, not in its elimination, in energetic, resolute attacks upon the well-entrenched rights and economic relationship of the bourgeois society,

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[79] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.179.
[80] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.192.

> without which a socialist transformation cannot be accomplished. But this dictatorship must be the work of the class... it must proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses; it must be under their direct influence, subjected to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of the people. [81]

The dictatorship is one of class which means that in "the broadest public form, on the basis of the most active, unlimited participation of the mass of the people, of unlimited democracy." [82] In 'What Does the Spartacus League Want?' she argues again that it is the proletariat itself who must bring about socialism.[83] In 'The National Assembly' Luxemburg says again the dictatorship will be democratic in the socialist sense: "It is the use of all measures of political power to realise socialism, to expropriate the capitalist class in the interest and through the will of the majority of the proletariat." [84]

She defines the dictatorship of the proletariat as the rising of the mass of the labouring people with all political power. This is similiar to Lenin's definition, as we shall see, but for Luxemburg the emphasis is on the masses who bring about the revolution. This is illustrated in the following emotionally charged passage:

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[81] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.394.
[82] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.393.
[83] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.368.
[84] Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings, p.265.

> Not where the wage slave sits next to the capitalist, the rural proletarian next to the Junker in fradulent equality to engage in parliamentary debate over questions of life or death, but where the million-headed proletarian mass seizes the entire power of the state in its calloused fist, like the god Thor his hammer, using it to smash the head of the ruling classes - that alone is democracy, that alone is not a betrayal of the people. [85]

But how are the masses to avail themselves of this power? The workers' and soldiers' councils that sprung up out of the revolution were the key. These were the uniting and distinguishing organisations of Social Democracy. It is the councils alone that would realise socialism since they embody democractic socialism and the socialist future. [86] It is they that must seize power. Councils are the expression of the will of the masses. During the dictatorship of the proletariat they are the organs of mass representation.[87] They unite the legislative and executive power in the hands of the masses.[88] The councils are the central feature of the new state machinery "concentrating all powers in its hands and utilising this power for one purpose of the socialist revolution." [89] Luxemburg was convinced that the councils

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[85] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.372.
[86] See Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.414.
[87] Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings, p.272.
[88] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.425.
[89] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.426.

must be democratic since democracy "possesses a powerful corrective namely, the living movement of the masses, their unending pressure. And the more democratic the institutions, the livelier and stronger the pulse beat of the political life of the masses, the more direct and complete their influence." [90]

The councils must be built up from below and are therefore dependent on the revolutionary consciousness of the masses. [91] Only through "constant, vital, reciprocal contact between the masses of the people and their organs, the workers' and soldiers' councils, can the activity of the people fill the state with a socialist spirit."[92] This is vital to an understanding of Luxemburg's work. The masses lead the revolution, the masses create socialism, the masses are socialism and it is this which ensures the democractic nature of the revolution and the future for socialism. The recognition of councils as the proletarian organ of power is not enough to keep the power with the masses. The people must also be armed in a worker's militia. The central authority of the army would be replaced in the Red Guard by voluntary discipline of the soldiers. Officers would be elected, and the right of immediate recall implemented. [93]

The society hinted at for the future will need to completly transform the state, political and economic life, and must therefore replace all organs of bourgeois rule:

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[90] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.386-7.
[91] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.426.
[92] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.368-9.
[93] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.372.

"the assemblies, parliament and city councils - with all its own class organs" must be replaced by "soldiers' and workers' councils."[94] Another important point is that the councils must represent the urban, as well as the rural proletariat.[95]

Luxemburg says little of the specifics of the socialist state as for her it was impossible to know what was to happen in the future. Socialism "should only be, and can only be, a historical product born out of the school of its own experience, born in the course of its realisation, as a result of the developments of living history."[96] This does not mean that nothing could be said about the future. Part of her vision of socialism was that the country and the town would no longer be divided and contrasted. Socialism was not possible without a radical transformation of the economy and this included the socialization of agriculture.[97] Although the specifics of the future are not discussed socialism does not "begin in the promised land after the foundations of the socialist economy are created". It begins "simultaneously with the beginnings of the destruction of class rule and the construction of socialism."[98]

Even once a revolutionary government is in power, its power base will never really be sound until world revolution can create the "granite foundations on which the edifice of

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[94] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.368.
[95] Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings, p.265.
[96] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.390.
[97] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.425.
[98] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.394.

the future can be constructed." [99] The international proletariat is never forgotten by Luxemburg during the struggle in Germany. What unites the movement in Germany with the international movement is that which distinguishes the socialist revolution from the bourgeois, its own organisation, the soldiers' and workers' councils.

From this we can see then, that it is the masses who take and hold power in the dictatorship of the proletariat. The party does not. Only in this way can the 'withering' away of the state, the disintegration of this transitional state be accomplished and therefore communism, the ultimate goal, be reached. A communist society is a stateless society. For Luxemburg, the socialist states ruled by the masses for the masses will make a communist society possible. Given that the masses play the leading role in the Luxemburg's analysis what is the role of the party for her? This is what we will examine in the next section.

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[99] Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, p.371.

C. The Role of the Party

The issue of the role of the party was central to the debate between Lenin and Luxemburg. For both theorists the working class party was one of the major components of the socialist revolution, but they asigned it differing roles. For Luxemburg, the party was not the most important element of the revolution. It is always the masses themselves who were the true leaders, who made the policies and who would eventually take power after a successful revolution. The party was one tool, albeit a very important one, in this struggle. The difference between Lenin and Luxemburg on the role of the party in our opinion, can only be fully understood if the respective views of each theorist on the transitional state are kept in mind. It is not enough to enumerate the different roles each appointed to the party. It was their distinctive visions of the dictatorship of the proletariat that determined Lenin's and Luxemburg's view of organisation. With this in mind let us look in some detail at Luxemburg's understanding of the role of the party in the struggle for socialism.

Luxemburg contends that the Social Democractic party should identify the tendencies present in a situation that would lead to mass struggles. The party must try to explain and clarify, to agitate and illuminate forms of mass action, and try to intensify and develop them by providing the appropriate slogans and direction. It must adopt an offensive strategy and involve the masses, and thereby

transcending the dualism of minimum and maximum demands.

The party is to give political leadership to the struggle. That is "to give the cue for, and the direction to, the fight; to so regulate the tactics of the proletarian struggle in its every phase ... that all the power available to the proletariat is released and active." [100] The party must make certain it is resolute, clear and accurate never falling "below the level demanded by the actual relations of forces, but rather rise above it." [101] If this is achieved then Social Democracy will give "self-confidence and security and a desire for struggle." [102] For Luxemburg, despite this leading role in the struggle, the working class party will not assume power. We will discuss this in greater length below.

Luxemburg sees several potential problems facing Social Democratic organisations. The first is the problem of the leadership of a mass strike. Leadership of a mass strike is limited because during a revolutionary upsurge it is "extremely difficult .. to foresee and calculate which occasions and which factors can lead to explosions and which cannot."[103] Giving direction to a mass strike is really only possible where individual acts are concerned and usually when such strikes are confined to a single town. [104] In the Russian Revolution of 1905, action not officially organised

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[100] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.189-190.
[101] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.190.
[102] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.190. See also p.250.
[103] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.188. See also p.197.
[104] See Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.188.

by any party, played a large role. This was not because the party was young or weak, but because the various acts of the struggle occurred at many levels, in the city and the countryside, involving different strata and sectors of the proletariat, and different political groups such as the liberals and the socialists. The strikes intertwined and changed so often, so quickly, and developed in so many unforeseen ways that coordination was impossible:

> ... the earlier mass and general strikes had originated from individual coalescing wage struggles which, in the general temper of the revolutionary situation and under the influence of the social democratic agitation, rapidly became political demonstrations; the economic factor and the scattered condition of trade unionism were the starting point; all-embracing class action and political direction the result. [105]

This is true of any real revolutionary situation for Luxemburg.

History does not develop in a linear fashion. Nothing is ever the same. There are no formulas or fixed plans to achieve socialism. Many different tactics and stategies are necesary.

> For Luxemburg a revolutionary crisis can ripen only in the course of the revolutionary process and without the active intervention of the masses and

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[105] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p. 170.

> the common leadership of the party towards the ultimate goal of the seizure of power, the situation can never mature inevitably and objectively and even less so of the masses themselves. [106]

What happens next depends on the actions of people, the masses, the party, the leaders and the bourgeoisie. It is due to this analysis that Luxemburg has been labelled a 'spontaneist'. Just what this consists of for Luxemburg needs to be examined.

In a revolutionary period the proletariat is organised and educated by the struggle itself, by the interacting of political and economic conflicts during the mass strike. This is why Luxemburg thinks an unorganised struggle, one that is 'spontaneous', is possible. This mechanism, specific to a revolutionary period, creates an organisation of its own. To understand her notion of spontaneity more clearly we will quote a passage where Luxemburg opposes the two types of spontaneity, her own and the 'crude' version. She says that the mass strike is spontaneous, but not

> in the sense of being chaotic, undisciplined, aimless, and leaderless. On the contrary, in both these strikes [Belgium of 1891 and 1893] the leadership showed itself to be completely identical with the masses; it marched at their head and controlled and directed the movement effectively precisely because it was at one with the thoughts

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[106]Basso,p.94.

> and feelings of the masses, and in contact with them; because it was their mouthpiece and the conscious expression of their aims.[107]

Luxemburg's spontaneity is not absence of organisation, rather it is self-organisation. This organisation is not the artifical creation so prone to the dangers of over bureaucratization and organisational fetishism. Nor is the movement of the masses without an objective driving force. For Luxemburg, therefore, faith in the masses should not refer to some psychological thunderbolt of socialism that will strike the masses on the same day. Rather, its basis lies in an understanding of the internal contradictions of the masses' position in capitalism which propels them to act in certain ways, leads to mass action and generates an organic leadership.

At this point, we can answer those critics of Luxemburg's who see her as underestimating the role of organisation. We can divide these critics into two types. The first are Luxemburg supporters, Frolich and Basso. The second are those who defend Lenin. The first see her underestimating the negative role of the party. They feel she did not fully realise just how conservative the membership of a mass organisation could be. This is not the case. She saw only too well the great power that the Social Democratic Party of Germany exerted over its members. She also realised the potential the party had for leading its

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[107] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p. 167.

members astray. It was for this that reason she remained in the Social Democratic Party of Germany instead of leaving much earlier to form a new organisation as so many thought she ought to have done. She wanted to be close to the masses and leaving the Social Democratic Party of Germany would not achieve this. She had no doubt that the masses were being duped in the party and stayed inside that massive organisation to fight the leadership's reformist policies and have her opinions publicized. In this way she hoped to show another way foward. Because she had little or no analysis of what this mass consisted of she eventually discovered that she had touched them very little, as was shown by the nationalism and hankering for war in 1914. Her mistake was not in underestimating the conservative power of organisation but in not analysing who exactly she was speaking to and what their specific interests were. We will examine this further.

The party, as a organisation, will be subject to the pitfalls of any organisation because of its position in society, for example, slow decision making and a need by party officials to protect the <u>party's</u> interests rather than the interests of its members. It is not subject in the same way to the economic and political pressures that the masses are. The party machinery is outside the economic exploitation cycle of capitalism. These pressures are what create the objective and subjective prerequisites for revolution. Therefore, it is not part of this contradiction

and may easily lose touch with the real battle. It could even become a hinderance as it has to intellectually analyse the situation to appropriate the exploitation and therefore may easily misinterpret what it sees, whereas for Luxemburg the masses are living the experience of exploitation, revolutionary struggle and defeats. They are therefore less likely than the leadership of a mass party to be complacent and rest on their laurels. For Luxemburg the mass party can only move the struggle foward if it realizes its secondary role to that of the proletariat and does not substitute its own existence for the revolution. If the party fails to fufill its role then the struggle, disorganised and unpoliticized, will become one of the many defeats to be rigorously examined and criticised.

The second criticism made aginst Luxemburg is that she underestimated the positive role of leadership. Lukacs for example, claims she did not understand the importance of building a revolutionary vanguard. [108] In Luxemburg's defense, she knew an organisation was vital for revolution as was stated above. For Luxemburg the revolution needs leadership as well as organised masses. This leadership may spring from the masses during times of struggle. Thus, the idea of a single long term organisation which retains leadership before and after a revolution was not part of her ideas. In this sense, she did not support the notion of a vanguard. This does not mean that an organisation, a party,

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[108] Lukacs, p.274-275.

does not play a major role in her ideas. It is this misunderstanding of what organisation consists of for Luxemburg that has led to accusations that she underestimated its role. For Luxemburg, it is the masses who take power, not the party and it is a sign of strength and revolutionary power that the party disintegrates once the councils begin to comprehend their true position in the revolutionary struggle. In a revolutionary period the power and leadership role of the party will be divested into the councils. Here again the problem arises of recognising a revolutionary period. Not only must the party be able to recognise the revolutionary period, it must also recognise when a revolutionary period begins and when it has ended. It must do this in order to change its role and actions in accordance with the position of the proletariat at the time.

Luxemburg contends that through mistakes, failures and triumphs the proletariat will develop a socialist consciousness. Therefore the work of social democracy was done largely before the taking of power. It was done during the various struggles and 'defeats' that make up the wider revolution. She also thought that in the crisis situation many would turn to socialism. But how do the masses 'remember' from crisis to crisis what was learned before? If they are to learn from their mistakes, how can this knowledge be passed on? Is it through a continuity of leadership or through some unstated view of Luxemburg's that there is some continuity and repetition of struggles?

Luxemburg did not pose these questions and thus offered no solutions.

Despite her view of the importance of the masses, she failed to analyse the specific forms of dominant capitalist organisation that prevented or impaired the growth of consciousness in the proletariat. The factory, school, military service, political democracy are agents of socialization shaping the lives of all workers, individually and collectively. Another influence on the workers in countries where capitalism was well entrenched, was the relative prosperity many workers enjoyed. Since she never analysed these influences, she never made any suggestions as to how to counteract these them, either in calm periods or in times of struggle.

The form of organisation is developed in the struggle. But the struggle was long term. For the period in which she was active in Germany, she thought a revolutionary organisation would evolve from the struggle. The weapon of the mass strike actually defines the relationship between the revolutionary subject and any organisation.

Luxemburg has no rigid vision of organisation. It is born in struggle. She wrote:

> [O]n the one hand the proletarian army is recruited only during the course of the struggle and on the other, it is only in the course of the struggle that it becomes clear in its own mind as to its aims. On the one hand, apart from the general principles of

> the struggle there are no ready-made, detailed tactics, established in advance, in which the members of Social Democratic Party could be drilled .... On the other hand, the course of the struggle which creates the organisation causes continual fluctuation in the sphere of influence of social democracy. [109]

Capitalism "can be seriously called into question only by organising and concentrating the numbers, the resources, and the capacities which the proletariat has potentially at its command and by unleashing these in the most energetic fashion from their normal subodination to the interests of profit". This requires "genuine organs of proletarian democracy such as worker's councils and the unfolding of the class struggle." [110] This leads to a situation of dual power which cannot be tolerated by the bourgeoisie, forcing them into a life and death struggle. As consciousness is formed and changes in the course of the struggle, so does organisation. This idea allowed Luxemburg to recognise before others did, the power of the new organisational form in the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Soviets, and to applaud the Worker's Councils formed in 1918 in Germany. These were formed out of the struggle and these organisations were seen as the beginning of dual power, the method of seizure of power by the proletariat, the historical representation of the final goal.

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[109]Luxemburg cited in Basso,p.104.
[110]Geras,p.124-5.

Luxemburg recognised several dangers in the party. The first, the difficulty of leadership, was dicussed above. The second is the danger of the party raising above the proletariat in importance in the struggle and third is the bureaucratization of the party. In the pamphlet 'The Mass Strike' she pointed out the leadership of the German Social Democratic Party. were increasingly fetishistic about their organisation. They were becoming more concerned with the survival of the organisation itself than with its raison d'etre, the revolution. Although in this work she was discussing the trade union movement, the points she made were equally applicable to the Social Democratic Party of Germany; "not above amongst the heads of the leading directing organisations ..., but below amongst the organised proletarian masses, lies the guarantee of the real unity if the labour movement." [111] The problem of bureaucratization goes hand and hand with the party placing the interests of its own organisation above its members. As the party grows in numbers and assets, it also needs paid functionaires who specialise in some area of the organsation. This bureaucracy has a tendency to slow decision making. The size and weight of the machinery of the whole organisation will tend to make its executive conservative favouring the status quo.

The fourth danger facing the party and perhaps the most important is that of becoming divorced from the masses. Leadership is not from outside but is a "factor of the

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[111] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.218.

unified process of proletarian struggle conditioned by the historical situation and by the unorganised and organised proletariat's reactions to the stimulus of events." [112] If the party is detached from the masses, its orders will be doomed to failure because they do not match the mood and objective needs of the people. She understood the dangers of leaders who apply the brakes: "a vacillating weak tactic, based on an underestimation of the proletariat, has a crippling and confusing effect upon the masses... [T]hey remain ineffective amidst direct summons of the directing body to mass strikes." [113] But if the party sucessfully interprets the situation and remains in permanent contact with the people it "furthers and channels and indeed arouses its fighting potential." [114] It can only do this by initiative. Conscious direction can only be useful as leadership tools when they are combined with adaptability and "the closest possible contact with the mood of the masses."[115] To ensure a connection between the leaders and the masses, leaders must not just issue orders but "make every effort to explain them, clarify their reasons and aims, to tell the truth to the masses."[116]

By 1910 Luxemburg was even stronger about the possible negative effects of a party lagging behind the masses. In the 'Next Step' she seems to be writing to the SPD

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[112] Basso.p.102.
[113] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks,p.190
[114] Basso,p.102.
[115] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks,p.188
[116] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks,p.189.

leadership rather than the rank and file readers. She warns the leadership that if the party fails to lead the masses "then they are inevitably overcome by a certain disillusionment, their courage vanishes and the action collapes of itself." [117] Again later in the same article she says if the party were "to hesitate for long, to extend the pause between each battle, to be indecisive in choosing the method and strategy of the further stuggle" this would mean "virtually to lose the battle", [118]

This shows how important party leadership was for Luxemburg, that she understood that the party could quash a revolutionary movement. She goes on to point out that large organisations "which bear responsibility for millions are naturally hesitant to pass resolutions which after all must be carried out by others." [119] It is very difficult from a committee room to give the order to send other men on the street to their deaths or to prison if the action should fail. More than this "the liberation of the working class can only be the work of the working class itself" therefore "the decision to undertake a direct mass action can originate only in the mass itself." [120]

Unfortunately Luxemburg never examined what organisational safeguards were necessary for the leadership to achieve these ends. She never, as Lenin did, envisaged a cadre system or any institutionalised form of

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[117] Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings, p.149.
[118] Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings, p.151.
[119] Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings, p.159.
[120] Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings, p.159.

leadership/mass interaction. She never addressed the problem of the effect the socialist organisation could have on the workers, for example, party loyalty and the growth of a labour aristocracy inside the party or the trade unions. Her failure to do this meant that she failed to recognise the stratification between the proletarian members, the activists, the sympathisers, and the officials of such organisations. Each group had its own interests, needs and each required a different analysis with respect to how revolutionary activists should approach them.

In our opinion she saw so many dangers in large organisations due to her experience with the German Social Democratic Party that she felt any institutionalized safeguards would be ineffective. The only real defense against any of the many pitfalls of organisation was the continued pressure of the mass movement itself. This can clearly be seen throughout Luxemburg's work. For example in 1904 she says "the working class demands the right to make its mistakes and learn in the dialectic of history." [121] In 1918 she wrote "to be sure, every democratic institution has its limits and shortcomings, things which it doubtless shares with all other human institutions. But the remedy ... the elimination of democracy as such, is worse than the disease it is supposed to cure; for it stops up the very living source from which alone can come the correction of all the innate shortcomings of social institutions. That

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[121] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.130.

source is the active, untrammeled, energetic political life of the broadest masses of the people." [122]

Luxemburg's vision of organisation formed in the struggle, is problematic. It seems that the party is to be de-institutionalised in a revolutionary period. Exactly what this would look like or how the party could then carry out its allotted tasks she does not say. The party's relationship to the councils is also not discussed. Given the problems faced in Russia between the Bolsheviks and the Soviets that Luxemburg knew about, it is surprising she says nothing about this. Luxemburg holds that most of the party's work will be done before the revolution itself and this is probably why she did not address these questions. The party will not be necessary and therefore will disappear as the masses take more and more power.

This seems to answer one criticism but presents us with a far greater one; that is her failure to define 'the mass'. Did she mean by 'the mass' the proletariat, the working class in general, all those exploited under capitalism or even, as she sometimes seems to imply, the majority of the population as a whole? [123] The magnitude of Luxemburg's failure to analyse the composition of the masses can now be fully appreciated. Luxemburg's vision of organisation, a propaganda machine in calm times, leadership in revolutionary times which disintegrates as the masses gain consciouness and political strength, requires the need for

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[122] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p, 387.
[123] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p. 171.

leadership to be aware of exactly whom it is addressing. If after the successful revolution, the masses take power in the dictatorship of the proletariat then all the work of consciousness raising must be done before the revolution. This is left up to the leadership of the organisation. But without a deep understanding of those to whom it is speaking how can the party ever hope to achieve this momentous task? Not only must the party understand in depth those it is addressing but it must also understand the pressures and forms of ideology the masses are being subjected to by a capitalist society. Unfourtunately Luxemburg only addressed this question on a very general level and this was not enough. This was made paramount in 1914 by her complete shock at the attitude of the German mass to war. The fact that she was shocked by their reaction betrays on her part, a lack of understanding of those she hoped to convince.

III. Lenin

A. Politics and Economics in the Capitalist State

Lenin very early in his career began studying the economic development of Russia. Using Plekhanov's work as a point of departure, Lenin tried to establish the concrete nature of capitalist development in Russia, to show its progression from feudalism to capitalism. He argued that in the case of Russia, capitalism was progressing through four stages; from usury capital to market capital then to manufacturing capital and finally to industrial capital. He later added a fifth stage of capitalism, imperialism, which we discuss below. Lenin defined capitalism as a particular stage of commodity production when human labour became a commodity. [124] He argued that using this criterion much of Russia was already capitalist even though superficially older economic relations continued to exist. This particular combination was possible, Lenin argued, because capitalism first subordinates production as it finds it, and only somewhat later does it alter production techniques. [125] This process was a reflection of the uneven and varied development of capitalism.

Like Luxemburg, Lenin addressed the question of the growth of the market under capitalism. For Lenin it was possible for capitalism to find a market at home since different phases of accumulation expanded the size of the

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[124] CW1,93 and 430,437.
[125] CW1,437-8.

market. Lenin could find much evidence to demonstrate the brisk development and growing specialization in many trades and areas of commodity production in Russia. For example, as the social division of labour continued to develop, this caused an extension of commodity production and an equal increase in goods that needed to be bought. Lenin pointed to much evidence in Russia to show that the level of consumption and therefore the standard of living had actually declined although the quantity of goods purchased had risen. However,

> ...the impoverishment of the masses of the people ... not only does not hinder the development of capitalism, but, on the contrary, is the expression of that development, is a condition of capitalism and strengthens it.[126]

The growth of capitalism in Russia gave rise to a more mobile work force whose ties to traditional society were being systematically eroded. Lenin argued that this would lead to a work force that would see itself as a distinct class. [127] It is at this point that Lenin's economic views begins to determine his analysis of the party. Examining economic trends, Lenin concluded that the proletariat was the only social group that could represent and lead all of the exploited. In other words, Lenin's economic analysis is very important in showing why it was only the proletariat that could be the vanguard of the revolution. Let us now

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[126]CW1,102-3.
[127]CW3,382.

examine why he argued this is so.

His argument takes the following form. Capitalism in Russia developed in a fashion peculiar to that country. Long years of centralised Tsarist rule meant that there was little devolution of power to the aristocracy. The Russian aristocracy remained closely tied to the Tsarist aristocracy and took no independent initiatives. As market relations evolved, it was foreign capital that provided most of the investment. No strong indigenous bourgeoisie emerged to promote liberal democratic ideologies as had occurred in the west. The bourgeoisie that did emerge was tied to the centralised power of the Tsar. Therefore, only the proletariat, the new rising class of capitalism, had the political will and the social strength to lead a revolution in Russia, despite its relatively small numbers.

It was the worker's position in the capitalist economy that drove him away from the old peasant relations and thus created class consciousness. [128] The proletariat is the vanguard because it alone is in a position to understand exploitation:

> Here [in the factory] the proletariat is large scale, socialised and concentrated ... exploitation is fully developed and emerges in its purest form, without any confusing details. The worker cannot fail to see that he is oppressed by <u>capital</u> and that his struggle has to be waged against the bourgeois

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[128] CW3, 382 and 546.

> class ... the class which oppressed and crushes the working people not only in the factories but everywhere. [129]

The worker represents not just himself but all the exploited: "he is the sole and natural representative of Russia's entire working and exploited people." [130] Lenin's economic analysis led him to the conclusion that due to the social and economic conditions in Russia, the proletariat must act on his own behalf and on behalf of the majority of the exploited in Russia, the peasantry and semi-proletarian classes, with whom the proletariat was intimately linked. These sections of the population were unable to represent themselves because of the more diffuse and diverse exploitation they suffered. Also the type of work they did restricted movement, communication and therefore organisational potential. This also inhibited their awareness of themselves as a class. This was not so with the proletariat. As the expectations of this new industrial worker rises, together with his insistence on some dignity in life, so new social and political relations will begin in Russia.

After the outbreak of World War I Lenin began work on an extension of his earlier economic analysis to understand the connection between capitalism and war. He argued that capitalism had changed its nature; from being a competitive progressive system, it had become monopolistic and

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[129] CW1,299.
[130] CW1,299 and CW3,31. See also CW1,379-80,299 and CW3,31.

degenerate. The expression of this new form of capital was imperialism. This also meant, as we will see, that the objective conditions were now such that an advance to socialism was possible.

In 'Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism', Lenin identifies the five basic features of imperialism. [131] First, was the concentration of production and the creation of monopolies. Lenin cited the cartel as the main device by which capitalists concentrate and eliminate competition. [132] He discussed the regressive and stagnant nature of finance capital and how it deliberately tried to stop technical progress. [133] This type of capitalism, however, also had produced a huge number of workers in massive factories which clearly defined the proletariat as a class. In as much as imperialism established the conditions necessary for socialism it was progressive: "Imperialism, a continuation of capitalism - its highest stage - in a sense, is a transition stage to socialism."[134]

Imperialism also accentuated the basic flaws in capitalism: the imbalances between different sectors of industry and between different countries: [135] "the monopoly created in <u>certain</u> branches of industry increases and intensifies the anarchy inherent in capitalist production as a <u>whole</u>."[136]

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[131] CW22,266.
[132] CW22,202
[133] CW22,276.
[134] CW24,464. See also CW22,302-3.
[135] CW22,241.
[136] CW22,208.

The second component of imperialism was the merger of bank and industrial capital as banks also began to monopolise and concentrate wealth. [137] This development also facilitated the transition to socialism since it provided a mechanism for centralised accounting and the distribution of the means of production under socialism.

The third element in Lenin's analysis of imperialism was the export of capital. Here Lenin seemed to be arguing that certain leading sectors of capitalist accumulation have a huge surplus for which they could find no outlet in the advanced capitalist countries. [138] Consequently, they looked elsewhere in the world for investment opportunities. It was capital that was now exported, not goods. This benefited the working class in the advanced capitalist centers as well as the capitalist class.[139] The working class had new benefits such as higher wages, welfare systems, and a wider selection of material goods. The consequences were shown in the example of Britain where the working class had been 'bought off'.[140] This also explained jingoism and working class opportunism in imperialist countries and Lenin concluded, it was therefore unrealistic to expect revolution to begin in these countries. Revolution would break out in capitalism's weakest link - the exploited countries where the working class did not have these advantages.

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[137] CW22,210.
[138] CW22,242.
[139] CW22,283.
[140] CW22,283.

The fourth and fifth components of imperialism - the division of the world by monopolistic trusts and imperialist powers depicted the terrible consequences for the world if the socialist revolution was not forthcoming. These finance cartels using modern means of communication, would internationalize this economic system and the imperialist countries, many of whom were of equal strength and would fight for dominance of world markets and territorial spoils.

Like Luxemburg, Lenin also in the tradition of the Second International, was influenced by Positivism. He sought an objective, economic foundation for his political work. Unlike Luxemburg, most of Lenin's analysis concentrated specifically on Russia, rather than the capitalist system as a whole. He extrapolated from the Russian situation only when the country showed signs of becoming integrated into the world capitalist system, with the advent of imperialism.

For Lenin capitalism had now reached a stage in Russia where the transition to socialism was possible. (We will discuss this further below.) Rather than seeing revolution likely in advanced capitalist countries as Luxemburg did, Lenin felt the country where capitalism's hold was weakest would be most likely to have a revolution. This difference also impacted on their disparate views of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Luxemburg argued that in order to have a <u>socialist</u> revolution, it is necessary to have a class conscious majority and this was possible only in a country

where the majority of the population consists of the proletariat. In a country where most of the population did not live under conditions necessary for the formation of class consciousness, then a socialist revolution and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat was an impossibility. For Lenin, on the other hand, a class conscious majority was not an essential for revolution. The consciousness of the more backward elements of society could be raised after the revolution. Power could indeed be taken where capitalism was least implanted. Let us now turn to Lenin's view of revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

B. Revolution and the Transitional State

The type of revolution to be undertaken in Russia was problematic. Until October 1917 Lenin and Luxemburg both agreed that only a democractic revolution was on the agenda in Russia. However, by 1917, Lenin had changed his mind about the nature of the coming revolution in Russia and had accepted the view that socialism was a possible outcome. His reasons were two-fold: the weakness of the bourgeois government and the economic position inside Russia after three years of war.

On his return to Russia in April 1917, he gave a speech to those waiting to greet him, explaining that he now felt a socialist revolution was possible in Russia. He explained that the democratic revolution achieved in February 1917, must now pass to its second stage "which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasantry." [141] The government of the bourgeoisie had shown itself to be weak, vacilliating and representing capitalism in Russia. Secondly, the war had increased the rate of growth of capitalism in Russia, especially state capitalism. [142] He argued that during the war years Russian capitalism had led the country to the brink of economic ruin. These years had also shown that capitalism could not rescue Russia from disaster. [143] The choice now facing Russia was rule by a militarised state capitalism or a socialist revolution led

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[141] CW24,22.
[142] CW24,240.
[143] CW24,513.

by the Soviets:

> Objective conditions make it the urgent task of the day to prepare the proletariat in every way for the conquest of political power in order to carry out the economic and political measures which are the sum and substance of the socialist revolution.[144]

This must be done not only in the factories but everywhere.[145]

In "State and Revolution', written from August to September, 1917, Lenin addresses specifically the question of the bourgeois state, its strengths and areas of weakness and vulnerability. The bourgeois state is a repressive force,[146] and its power is concentrated in special armed forces alienated from society and standing above it.[147] The existence of the state manifests class characteristics as there would be no need for a state apparatus in the absence a class conflict.[148] The modern representative state is an instrument of exploitation of wage labour by capital.[149] It is characterised, Lenin argues, by two main institutions, the standing army and the bureaucracy.[150] The main thrust of the text is that the oppressed will never be freed unless the bourgeois state is destroyed in revolution.[151]

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[144]CW25,460.
[145]CW1,299.
[146]CW25,399.
[147]CW25,389.
[148]CW25,383.
[149]CW25,392.
[150]CW25,407.
[151]CW25,387 and 403.

The central issue of revolution, for Lenin, was the transfer of power from a state institution representing the interests of bourgeouisie to one working for the proletariat. In a short article titled 'The Dual Power' written in April, 1917, he writes "the basic question of every revolution is that of state power. Unless this question is understood, there can be no intelligent participation in the revolution, not to speak of the guidance of the revolution." [152] Later in the same pamphlet he reiterates this point; "the passing of state power from one class to another is the first principle, the basic sign of revolution, both in the strictly scientific and in the practical political meaning of that term.[153]

In 1917 Lenin defined revolution in terms of smashing the state. Revolution is "the proletarian class smashing the machine and commanding, governing, with the aid of a new machine." [154] In 'Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?', he says revolution is a "complicated process of the dying of the old and the birth of the new social order." It is the "sharpest most furious, desperate class struggle and civil war." [155]

For Lenin, the militia plays an enormous role in the revolution. It is the coercive, executive, and organising arm of the Soviets.[156] Replacement of the police, the

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[152]CW24,38.
[153]CW24,44. See also 445.
[154]CW25,482
[155]CW26,118.
[156]CW,24,353 and 426.

bureaucracy, and the standing army "by the universal arming of the whole people, by universal militia of the entire people, women included, is a practical job that can and should be tackled immediately. The more initiative, variety, daring and creativeness the masses contribute to this, the better..." [157] The Soviets and militia are predicated on mass participation in government: "we need not only representation along democratic lines, but the building of the entire state administration from the bottom up by the masses themselves, their effective participation in all of life's steps and their active role in the administration." [158]

As with Luxemburg, Lenin felt he could not go into any detailed account of what socialism would look like. He could give a general outline. If there was real workers control of the economy, the conditions would be created in which

> the working man can reveal his talents, unbend his back a little, rise to full height and feel that he is a human being. For the first time after centuries of working for others, of forced labour for the exploiter, it is possible to work for oneself and moreover to employ all the achievements of modern technology and culture in one's work. [159]

When the proletariat with its own armed forces [160] has replaced the bourgeois state, the dictatorship of the

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[157] CW,24,169-170.
[158] CW24,181. See also CW26,288 and 413.
[159] CW26,407
[160] CW25,397.

proletariat will have arrived. Here the proletariat is the ruling class.[161] The dictatorship will begin to 'wither' as people in their everyday lives, become accustomed "to observing the rules of community life without force, without special apparatus of coercion - the state." [162] Through habit "gradually and spontaneously" the state will disintegrate.[163] Since this will be a long process,[164] the dictatorship is a temporary tool in the fight to place the majority, the oppressed, in power by arming the masses. Under communism the state will be unnecessary. [165] The new socialist state will qualitatively change from being a state with separate groups of armed men and groups that make policy decisions, to the entire economic structure of society in the hands of the workers and the peasants. [166] The workers and peasants themselves will be armed and organised, the old bureaucracy will be removed and in its place will be the Soviets who are truly democratic as they allow "the majority of the people initiative and independence, not only in the election of deputies, but also in state administration, in effecting reforms and various other changes." [167]

This implies a change in democracy from the formal recognition of the equality of citizens, to equal rights to

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[161]CW25,400 and 459.
[162]CW25,462.
[163]CW25,463.
[164]CW25,457.
[165]CW25,464.
[166]CW25,377.
[167]CW25,368.

determine the structure and administration of the state, that is, to socialist democracy. In a capitalist society the fight for wider democracy (i.e.voting rights, freedom of the press, the right to assemble etc.) is necessary to influence the workers and help reveal to them their situation in a capitalist society and train them in organisational matters. [168]

> the form of oppression is no matter of indifference. A wider freer, and more open form of class struggle and of class oppression [in a capitalist society] enormously assists the proletariat in the struggle for the abolition of classes in general [169]

In bourgeois society, the state represents the repression of the majority by a minority and the systematic use of violence by one class against another. [170] Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, democracy changes. Now the vast majority suppresses by force the minority. But real democracy, that is democracy for all, will only be possible in a communist society when classes disappear and so therefore does any form of a state. [171]

Socialist democracy consists of the replacement of capitalists and bureaucrats in the "control over production and distribution, in the work of keeping account of labour and products, by the armed workers, by the whole of the

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[168] CW25,452.
[169] CW25,454.
[170] CW25,455.
[171] CW25,462.

armed population."[172] Of course, Lenin admits, there would be mistakes, but this strategy, combined with Lenin's belief in the maturation of the masses through the experience of revolution, are what allow the possiblity of socialism. Lenin still held this view in December, 1917.

After the revolution there would also be many structural changes; all officials would be elected and subject to immediate recall.[173] All officials would be paid worker's wages. [174] Executive and legislative duties would be combined, [175] and all tasks would be simplified so they are within the capabilities of ordinary people.[176] Here Luxemburg was in full agreement with Lenin. [177]

Lenin discussed the importance of class consciousness in the transitional period: "Our idea is that the state is strong when the people are conscious. It is strong when the people know everything, can form an opinion of everything, and do everything consciously." [178] Genuine political consciousness consists for Lenin, in responding to "all cases of tyranny, oppresion, violence and abuse, no matter what class is affected" and to respond to it from a Social Democratic point of view. [179] The difficulty here, is the relationship between the proletariat and the peasantry in

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[172]CW25,477-8.
[173]CW25,419.
[174]CW25,420.
[175]CW25,424
[176]CW25,452 and 473-4.
[177]See Rosa Luxemburg Speaks,406-7,425,393 and 373.
[178]CW26,256 see also CW27,204.
[179]CW5,412.

the development of socialist consciousness. Putting aside the problems of stratififcation in these two groups (i.e. between skilled and unskilled, unemployed, migrant workers, and the rise of the richer peasant class) and looking at the larger problem of how the mass of the Russian population would achieve a class consciousness we find a large essentially untackled problem. Luxemburg's answer, unsatisfactory as it is, was to deal with this problem before the revolution, by defining a socialist revolution in terms of the masses taking power for themselves, ensuring the rule of the masses in the transitional state. Lenin on the other hand, feels that only a minority will be conscious of socialist aims before the revolution. It is <u>after</u> the revolution that he hopes this will spread through 'habit'. As to how exactly doing activites by rote, habit, can be called consciousness raising, he does not say. The vague concept of 'habit' is not enough to base a theory of raising consciousness on.

In 'State and Revolution', Lenin maintains, the organ for the take over of power was the Soviets. The Soviets, he argued, had an easy task as the machinery of the state need only be directly taken over intact. State capitalism had created all the centralised organs of power necessary for socialism, most notably the centers of finance capital, the banks. [180]

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[180] CW25,346.

On this point Lenin seems to divide bourgeois state. He advocates both smashing the bourgeois state and retaining some parts from which the Soviets will maintain power. These 'good' parts of the capitalist state enable the proletariat to take power more easily and include the financial and economic administration, especially the banks. The 'bad' parts of the capitalist state, those that must be completly destroyed, included the political and judicial institutions, especially the coercive institutions such as the standing army and the police. The implication was that in capitalist society there are some technical and planning organisational structures which can be lifted out of their particular political and economic framework and put into a different one. What exactly does smashing the bourgeois state consist of? Is it possible to retain some of the institutions of one economic and political system without also retaining some of the political and ideological framework of that system? The question remains in the transitional state, what of the old system must be destroyed, and what could be saved in order to smooth the path for a young socialist society.

In 'State and Revolution' Lenin constantly emphasised that the dictatorship will be proletarian class rule. The structural problems of basing a socialist revolution on an alliance of proletariat and peasantry are enormous. The peasants have different interests from the proletariat although some agreement may be found on very broad issues. Nonetheless, their areas of agreement must remain very

narrow. What should be done about this disagreement after the revolution? Lenin recognised this as a potential problem but his solution was not well thought out. He seemed to feel after the revolution the peasants would gradually come round to see the socialist state as representing their interests. However, as these two classes have different interests how would it be possible for a socialist state to serve both groups?

In most of Lenin's writings in this period it is unclear who will actually run the state during the dictatorship of the proletariat. Will it be the party, the proletariat, i.e. the vanguard, the most class conscious or the entire proletariat and the peasantry? In 'Will the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?' Lenin writes "the majority of the people are with us"[181] and therefore they must not refuse power if they have the possibility of taking it.[182] It is ambiguous who the "us" are. One might assume that Lenin meant the Bolsheviks, but later in the pamphlet he states that the proletariat has the support of the majority of the population. Does this proletariat refer to the party or the mass of the industrial workers? It is not my place to answer this question here. I merely want to show the ambiguity in Lenin at this stage in the revolution.

Part of the reason Lenin is vague about who will take power is his reluctance to back the Soviets wholeheartedly. In 1917 the Soviets, according to Lenin, were ripe with

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[181] CW,26,140.
[182] CW,26,90.

opportunism. The most powerful groups in them were in favour of cooperating with the Duma, the parliament formed after the February Revolution. The Duma represented the right and centre of Russian politics. The Bolsheviks did not want to compromise at all. Because of this situation, Lenin vacillated over the real role of the Soviets in the seizure of power.

Lenin's position on the Soviets is expressed succinctly in his remarks made in the 'April Theses' on his return to Russia (April 1917). He writes firstly, that the Bolsheviks are a small minority in the Soviets, "as against a bloc of all the petty-bourgeois opportunist elements ... who have yielded to the influence of the bourgeoisie and spread that influence among the proletariat."[183] The next paragraph goes on to say that the masses must be made to see that the "Soviets of Worker's Deputies are the only possible form of revolutionary government."[184] The Soviet form of organization was a correct one, argued Lenin, but in as much as the Soviets contained reformists, the Bolsheviks therefore could not support the Soviets. The task of the Bolsheviks was to "present patient, systematic, and persistent explanation of the errors of their tactics."[185] This was a difficult path. It is very hard to constantly criticise those in the Soviets without the form of the Soviets becoming compromised at some point. Luxemburg also

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[183]CW24,22
[184]CW24,23.
[185]CW24,23.

faced problems in the council movement but dealt with them very differently. She remained faithful to the idea of councils and fought the opportunism continually from the inside. She also fought those who felt the movement in 1919 was ready to take power. She saw opportunism and reformism as examples of 'mistakes' in the proletarian movement which were unavoidable and necessary for the growth of class consciousness. Lenin, on the other hand, criticized the Soviets, yet felt the moment for the seizure of power had arrived, begging the question, who would take power.

If Lenin was unclear about who would take power, it is perhaps because he wanted to issue to remain ambiguous. He may have been trying to hide his increasing emphasis on the party taking power. Luxemburg emphasised building councils and organs of indepedent proletarian class rule before taking power, and moving to build mass organisations that would enable the masses during and after the revolution to wield power for themselves. She was very clear about who would take power and the role of the party in this plan. Lenin's main emphasis is on getting rid of the old state and gaining state power for the proletariat, but by whom exactly is unclear. Let us examine this in more detail.

Writing in 'Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?' about the role of the party in the revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, Lenin says the Soviets are the new state apparatus representing the combined armed

force of the workers and peasants.[186] Soviets solved the problem of organisation in the dictatorship of the proletariat. However in the same pamphlet Lenin argues it is only the "class conscious worker disciplined by a long apprenticeship to capitalism ....workers who are capable of forming a workers' militia and gradually of enlarging it ... into a universal militia"[187] that can take power. Later, again in the same pamphlet, he says only confidence in their own ability learned through self-governing will enable the masses to govern themselves. But at the end of the pamphlet the class conscious worker is found in the party and the ideas seizing the masses are represented by the Bolsheviks:

> when the class conscious workers have found a party of a quarter of a million members for the purpose of taking this apparatus into their hands ... with the support of all the labouring and exploited masses ... there is no force on earth that can prevent the Bolsheviks ... from retaining (power).[188]

Discussing the question why in October 1917 the Bolsheviks must take power, Lenin addressed the criticism that they were not yet strong enough to do so. He argued that there were 240,000 members of the Bolshevik party:

> These 240,000 already have no less than a million votes of the adult population back of them...
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> Moreover, we have a 'magic means' for increasing

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[186]CW,26,103.
[187]CW,26,114.
[188]CW,26,130.

> tenfold our state apparatus with one stroke, a means which never has been and never could be at the disposal of the capitalist state. This magic thing is the drawing of the workers, the poor people, into the everyday work of managing the state. [189]

These passages show that Lenin's answer to this pressing problem of which body was to assume power in the transitional state, was vague. What is clear, however, is that for Lenin gaining the support of the majority of the masses was not a prerequisite for a socialist revolution. The party was strong enough and had enough support to assume power. Lenin was confident that after the revolution, in the transitional period, the workers and hopefully the peasantry could be drawn in.

In this transitional period, Lenin was aware that there would be many remnants of the old society. Luxemburg also addressed this problem. But the mechanisms the two had for dealing with this issue, differed. In Lenin's case, the party or a small group of the population are taking power in the name of the majority. After the revolution, it is this small group that will have to convince the majority through propaganda and action, of the benefits of socialism, just as the party had to do for the advanced sections of the working class before the revolution. For Luxemburg the majority of the masses would already, at the point of revolution, have some form of socialist consciouness. Thus the vast majority

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[189] CW26, 111-112.

will be structually incorporated into the new society, and finding ways of dealing with the remnants of the old society in a socialist manner need not be insurmountable.

For Lenin, in the transitional society, after power is taken, the real work of gaining mass support for socialism begins. Lenin's vision of the dictatorship is one of building up class consciousness and thereby creating the foundations for the dismantling of the state completely, and the eventual move to communism. Then "when all have learned to administer and actually do independently administer social production,... then the necessity of observing the simple, fundemental rules of human community life will very soon become a habit".[190]

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[190]CW25,474.

C. The Role of the Party

We have just seen how Lenin intends to build socialist consciousness after the revolution. What then is the role of the party? For Lenin the party was to "actively take up the political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness." [191] This agitation must be carried out "with regard to every concrete example of oppression ... and the political exposure of autocracy in all its aspects." [192] The role of the party for Lenin is to expose the true nature of events, the role of classes, the underlying interests and relationships, to each other and the Social Democratic viewpoint on all issues. "Our business as Social Demcratic publicists is to deepen, expand and intensify political exposures and political agitation." [193] All questions raised by agitation must be answered in a consistent Social Democratic spirit:

> the all round political agitation will be conducted by a party which unites into one inseparable whole the assult on the government in the name of the entire people, the revolutionary training of the proletariat and the safeguarding of its political independance, the guidance of the economic struggle of the working class, and the utilisation of all its spontaneous conflicts with its exploiters which rouse and bring into our camp increasing numbers of

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[191] CW5.400.
[192] CW5,400-401.
[193] CW5,414.

the proletariat.[194]

If there was any ambiguity as to whether the party should assume power in 1917, there was none as to its form. The tightly-knit, centralised and highly disciplined structure of 1905 remained. The party, Lenin wrote in 'What is to be Done?' would be built on a cell structure that elected representatives from each cell to committees representing several cells. This would culminate at the top with the Central Committee. The party conferences attended by representatives of the main party committees throughout Russia elected the Central Committee. That party democracy was adhered to, is exemplified by the fact that votes were taken by the Central Committee on the issue of when the storming of the Winter Palace, the last bastion of the Duma government, should take place.

The shape of Lenin's organisation was determined by several factors. Firstly, the nature of the oppressive Tsarist regime which made open party work virtually impossible. In order for a party to survive in a country with an autocratic regime, Lenin's solution was for it to be composed of a small number of professional revolutionaries. This was not just to be a "committee of students." [195] but a serious well-trained body of professionals. Only this type of vanguard "will organise really nation-wide exposures."[196] Confining membership to professional revolutionaries and to

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[194]CW5,432.
[195]CW5,465-466.
[196]CW5,431.

secrecy would accomplish two things. Firstly it will make the organisation less susceptible to repression from the government. Secondly, and to some extent because of the first reason, this party would attract more oppressed peoples to it when they saw that this organisation was serious and able to stand up to the enemy.

The second factor that shaped Lenin's party was his belief in the role of Marxist theory for revolution and therefore the necessity of intellectuals in the party to help clarify and push further this work. Without the theoretical tool of Social Democracy this action would not mature: "without revolutionary theory there can be no intellectuals and working class revolutionary movement."[197] Again he says, "the role of the vanguard fighter can be fufilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory."[198]

The revolution of 1905 gave Lenin confidence in Marxist theory: "revolutions purge of illusions, show whose side she is really on, and thereby teach the truth of Social Democracy and the importance of organisation for their defence and eventual bid for power." [199]

Intellectuals and social democractic theory help prevent mistakes and failures. Lenin said it was the conditions in Russia, "the concrete conditions at present obtaining in Russia" that make a strong revolutionary

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[197]CW5,369.
[198]CW5,370.
[199]CW8, 564.

organisation "absolutely necessary precisely for the purpose of giving stability in the movement and safeguarding it against the possibility of making thoughtless attacks." [200]

Common purpose unites the intellectuals and the working class in the party. [201] Class and consciousness are linked by the party for Lenin. Intellectuals are vital to this link as they are the articulators of theoretical knowledge essential to the enterprise. Although for Lenin intellectuals were necessary for the party, they could not be wholly trusted not to at some point return to their class. Therefore, party members must be constantly tried and tested to make sure of their loyalty and that they are not slipping in regard to party discipline.

The final factor determining Lenin's views on the party was that the party was at all times designed to take power. Lenin had always seen the party as an instrument for the eventual seizure of power. It was to be an effective propaganda machine, explaining daily political and economic life; a training ground for the military necessary to seize power and a training ground for cadres who could recruit more people to the party. After 1905 revolution and despite the Bolshevik surprise at its occurence, Lenin was more optimistic about the possibility of taking power. Although he at this time expected a successful revolution to be a democratic revolution, he still felt the Bolshevik party would lead it. He also hints at his eventual switch in

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[200] CW5,476. See also 477.
[201] CW5,452.

analysis on the type of revolution possible in Russia.

> From the democratic revolution we shall at once, and just in accordence with the measure of our strength, the strength of class-consciousness and organised proletariat, begin to pass to the socialist revolution... We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop half way. [202]

Unlike Luxemburg, for Lenin in 1917, numbers were not important as he believed that once in power support would follow from the obvious benefits of the rule of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

> The proletariat must first overthrow the bourgeoisie and conquer state power and then use the power of the state - the dictatorship of the proletariat - as the instrument of its class for gaining the sympathy of the majority of the workers. [203]

The ambiguity of Lenin's position in 1917 is aptly exemplified by the above quote. The party must take power if it possibly can, even if it does not have the support of the majority of people in Russia. This support will come later. The organ of power could be the Soviets but this is not a precondition of the assumption of power. Lenin's position can be better understood if two things are kept in mind. Firstly, as we said above, is that for Lenin there is no necessity for a majority of the proletariat to assume power. In this he differs from Luxemburg. Secondly, he is

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[202] Lenin cited in Hill, p.72.
[203] Lenin cited in Hill, p.87.

aware of ever increasing reformist role played by the Soviets in the Provisional Government. The Soviets had become identified with compromise and procrastination. Perhaps this made Lenin reluctant in the tense moments before the October revolution to publicize their potential and put his authority behind the Soviets as the organ of power, lest this be mistaken for agreement with the specific policies under discussion at that moment. Whatever the reason it must be said that Lenin did reduce his emphasis on the Soviets as the state apparatus in the dictatorship of the proletariat. As his subsequent actions showed, he no longer trusted the Soviets to be the guiding light of the revolution. This part continued to be played by the party itself.

IV. Conclusion

Luxemburg held that through knowledge of the economic mechanisms and contradictions of capitalism, the masses would learn that capitalism was doomed to failure. Through constant action, through failures and successes, and through the growth of the Social Democratic movement, a socialist revolution would come. The revolution would be led by the proletariat, whose own organisation which would take power. The Social Democratic party would fall away as a mass organisation replaces it. Thus the transitional state would be run by the masses and for the masses.

For Lenin, economic analysis identified the leadership of the revolution. In a country like Russia, with such a large peasantry, a socialist revolution was problematic. Lenin felt, due to the changes in the economy during the First World War and the failure of the Duma government, a socialist revolution was possible if led by the proletariat, in alliance with the peasantry. The proletariat was the vanguard, the only class to really have assimilated capitalist relations, and the only class for whom the benefits of socialism had an immediate appeal. Of course, the peasants were also revolutionary albeit they had different interests and their exploitation was more diffuse. Lenin vacillated on the question of the type of organisation which was to represent this alliance in the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Soviets, the obvious choice for this role, were run by sympathisers of liberal democracy. Whether

the make-up of the Soviets forced Lenin to fall back on the Bolshevik Party as the organ of power, or whether that is what he wanted all along, is difficult to determine But what this indecision shows us is that unlike Luxemburg, Lenin did not feel that the masses must take power for themselves for a revolution to be a socialist one. The state could be run on behalf of the masses until such time as they gained the socialist consciousness to run the state for themselves. The latter would be accomplished in the transitional period.

Before discussing the areas of disagreement between Lenin and Luxemburg it is necessary to look at the wide measure of agreement between them. Both agreed that the state in some form or other was necessary in the transitional period; that this period would be one of class rule, namely the domination of the majority over the minority in a dictatorship of the masses. Both agreed on the specific measures necessary to change the bourgeois state to one run by the masses, for the masses. [204] Both agreed that the bourgeois state must be smashed, [205] and that the dictatorship of the proletariat would enact socialist measures. [206] Both saw councils or Soviets as having some role in the dictatorship and that the dictatorship must eventually 'wither away' to be replaced by communism. Here we can begin to sift out some areas of conflict between Lenin and Luxemburg. At some levels the conflict manifests

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[204] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.406-7.
[205] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.425.
[206] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.393 and 373.

itself as a difference in emphasis on the importance of councils in the revolution. Luxemburg continually stresses that the growth of the proletarian consciousness is a necessary precondition for revolution, and it must grow from the active work of the proletarian class itself. Lenin emphasises the task of smashing the bourgeois state. Both agreed that each was necessary for revolution, but the different emphases signify deeper divergences.

This difference in emphasis in Lenin and Luxemburg clearly reflects their disparate visions of the dictatorship of the proletariat. For Luxemburg the party plays only a supporting role if it has any at all. By the time the dictatorship is in power, the masses will have reached a high stage of class consciousness and self-emancipation. This is essential if the council system is to be really effective in bringing about socialism. Until the masses have reached this stage all attempts at obtaining power are bound to fail and will be classed as necessary 'mistakes' and stages in the learning process of the class. As revolutions also speed up this process of the acquisition of of consciousness, all revolutionary activity is important. It is not necessary to wait for all the masses to be 'class conscious' before any revolutionary activity can be undertaken. So the party must always encourage any revolutionary movement in the masses no matter how premature the party thinks the action is. Thus, much of the work of shaping the outlook of the dictatorship of the proletariat

is done before the revolution.

For Lenin, on the other hand, it is only after the revolution that the initiative of the masses is structually incorporated into the organ of power. Before the revolution the party's main objective is winning the battle for state power. The ambiguity about who exactly will wield power reflects both the problems he faced in Russia but also his belief in the need to obtain state power as a means to create a socialist consciousness in the Russian mass, rather than as a reflection of the level of consciousness already reached.

This analysis is also borne out from the implications of their different economic analyses. Luxemburg sees revolution as possible only in countries where capitalism is deeply entrenched, and where the system is disintegrating due to its own internal contradictions. Lenin, on the other hand, sees revolution as possible in countries where capitalism is weak. This of course, could reflect a difference in context, namely, Lenin is dealing with a country with an largely peasant population, while Luxemburg is in Germany with a well entrenched capitalist economy and a well organised mass working class party. But context does not explain everything. In order to clarify this point further it is necessary to project Luxemburg's views onto a country where capitalism has not yet fully developed. In such a country, due to a lack of support from the majority, who would not yet be in proletarian relations to capital, a

socialist revolution was impossible. This is because a socialist revolution must be led by a class conscious mass who take power during the revolution. This is what dictatorship of the proletariat meant for Luxemburg and it is by definition not possible if the mass are not socialist before they take power.

It is because Lenin saw the transitional society as one in which class consciousness was developed, ruled by a minority on behalf of the majority, that he insisted a socialist revolution was possible in a weakly developed capitalist country. This is not to say Luxemburg did not agree with the Bolshevik seizure of power. She praised their courage. However, this does not mean she thought that the October revolution was a socialist one. Rather, for Luxemburg, the October revolution was a revolutionary take over by a socialist party working toward future socialist aims. In the meantime, liberal democratic policies would serve the interests of the vast majority of the Russian population.

As we mentioned above, the difference between Lenin and Luxemburg is only partly due to their different circumstances. Here it is appropriate return to Nettl's analysis mentioned at the beginning of the paper. If the differences could be explained entirely by their different situations then it would not be possible to compare these two thinkers. We of course believe a comparison is possible since no matter what the circumstances, Lenin held it was

not necessary for the dictatorship of the proletariat to be run by the masses. It could be run by the party until such time as the masses could take power for themselves.

This difference in vision over the dictatorship of the proletariat affects not only the shape and role of the party but also the transition to communism. The dictatorship of the proletariat was for both theorists a necessary temporary stopgap between capitalism and communism. But it must dissolve into a self-governing society. A major problem then in the dictatorship of the proletariat was of building organisations and institutions that were meant to dissolve. The position of state institutions in the dictatorship of the proletariat is similar to the position of Luxemburg's party in bourgeois society. If the revolution and attainment of power had developed along the lines Luxemburg envisaged, the problem of the transition from socialism to communism would be much easier to realise. The experience and precedent of self-govenment and taking of power by the unorganised mass, would be there.

Lenin's position would not make the transition so easy. This is not to say Lenin was not in agreement with Luxemburg about the possibilty and hope for communism. The circumstances in Russia were such that socialist self-government and the dissolution of the state were distant goals. But Lenin's path to power did not bring its inception any closer.

The problem of democratization of the state organisation after the revolution became apparent to Lenin in 1918. He now knew socialism had to be postponed in Russia. He had had an exaggerated view of how simple it would be to devolve power into the hands of the masses. There was a huge discrepancy between the need to centrally control the state and industry and mass participation. He had to face a low level of socialist consciousness in the Russian mass. Most were not proletarian and had little education and a low level of culture. Within the country the new tasks to be tackled were "a period of slow construction and ruthless tightening up, of prolonged and persistent struggle waged by the stern, proletarian discipline against the menacing element of petite-bourgeois laxity and anarchy." [207]

Both theorists rely on the idea of self-emancipation of the working class. For Lenin, this was to come about after the socialist revolution whereas for Luxemburg, it was a requirement for a revolution to be socialist. Both these analyses require an ethical component. That is, a will to move society towards socialism and communism. This is what is meant by the maturity of the working class as a ruling class. The first major question about this ethical component is when will this come about. For Lenin it may be before or after the revolution. This was not important. There must be a large number of party members deeply committed to

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[207] CW27,290.

socialism during the revolution, but majority support before the revolution is necessary only for the act of revolution, that is the sweeping away of the old order. Support for socialism will be gained afterwards through the policies of the party.

For Luxemburg this was not the case. Majority support for socialism must be and will be formed during the revolution itself. Lenin also agrees this happens but it did not carry the force of an imperative for him that it did for Luxemburg. For Luxemburg this must happen. If it does not, the revolution has not been a socialist one. A second vital reason this was necessary for Luxemburg was to avoid the dangers of the loss of democracy and the dictatorship of the party after the revolution.

How this connection between the ethical component and socialism is to be achieved is a problem for Luxemburg. It was not such a problem for Lenin in this period, as he believed the masses could be persuaded through example and experience once the Bolsheviks were in power. For Luxemburg most of this difficult business must take place before or during the revolution itself so that the dictatorship is a socialist society from the start. This meant that the party must analyse the economic conditions and explain the content of the social democratic programme to enlighten a proletariat surrounded on all sides by 'bourgeois ideology'. Here the enormity of Luxemburg's failure to analyse the determining capitalist forms pressing on the proletariat and

the stratification within the masses becomes all too apparent. These forms vitally affected the proletariat's capacity for revolutionary self-activity.

This does not mean that Luxemburg should be disregarded as a serious thinker. Her insights into a path open to those in highly industrializsed countries must not be devalued. It means that those who wish to take up her insights as opposed to Lenin's on this subject, have more work to do than merely historically updating her work.

Luxemburg left many questions unanswered. She was a journalist not a theoretician. She responded to individual issues seemingly with a body of collected Marxist theory to back it up. But when this theory is studied we find holes in her analysis: for example, her failure to analyse the 'mass', her lack of clarity about the organisation formed in struggle and her lack of any analysis on how lessons learned in revolutionary action can be passed on to future activists. Yet she did contribute to Marxist theory. More than this, she pushed foward a path of possible action different from that which others offered. The unanswered questions make the way forward more difficult for followers of Luxemburg. But in our opinion by applying her framework of thought we can reap great rewards on the path to a non-Leninist road to socialism.

Lenin was a much more thorough and practical thinker than Luxemburg. Because of this, it is tempting to conclude that Lenin was the 'better' more able thinker of the two.

However, there are major difficulties with his work as well, as we have argued: his ambiguity over who would take power; his ambiguity over the role of Soviets in the revolution; his vacillation on the question of involvement of the masses in the revolutionary process and his failure to work out in any kind of detail how the masses will be won to a socialist perspective once power has been seized in their name. Despite these and other problems, his contribution was recognised by many including Luxemburg:

> Lenin ... and his friends were the first, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the only ones up to now who can cry with Hutten: "I have dared!"
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> ... In this sense theirs is the immortal historical service of having marched at the head of the international proletariat with the conquest of political power and the practical placing of the problem of the realization of socialism, and of having advanced mightily the settlement of the score between capital and labour in the entire world. [208]

What Lenin analysed was more well thought out than Luxemburg, i.e. his economic theory and his vision of the party structure and role, but this can never take away from Luxemburg's insights into the possible structure of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the party as an accessory of the masses. In this vein one should cite

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[208] Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.395.

Lenin's testament to her; "...in spite of her mistakes she was - and remains for us - an eagle. And not only will communists all over the world cherish her memory, but her biography and her complete works... will serve as useful manuals for training many generations of Communists all over the world." [209]

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[209]CW33, April,16,1924.

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